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ABSTRACT

Public relations guidelines for school principals are offered in this handbook, with an emphasis on improving student achievement and internal and external communication. Six chapters discuss the principal's public relations role, internal communication, securing and maintaining community involvement, school publications, media relations, and self-development resources. Specific information includes a checklist for the principal's public relations role; strategies for improving school climate; guidelines for relationships with parents, new students, committees, and the community; techniques for improving written and oral communication skills; time management; and crisis management. (LMI)

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# Bridging

# SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

## Helpful public relations guidelines for principals

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**Helpful public relations guidelines for principals**

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# Acknowledgments

***Bridging Schools and Community*** is a collection of helpful public relations guidelines for building principals. From the principal's role in PR to communicating with internal publics, from getting community involvement to using publications to developing good media relations, this resource offers useful tips from various sources.

Special recognition is expressed to the contributors, including **Dr. Donald Bagin,** professor of communication at Glassboro (NJ) State College; **Patricia Crawford,** public information officer for Pittsburgh Public Schools; **Donald Gallagher,** professor of communications at Glassboro State College; **Albert E. Holliday,** director of the Educational Communication Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the *Journal of Educational Public Relations;* **Larry Litwin,** KYW Newsradio (Philadelphia) reporter and former public information director for Washington Twp. (NJ) Public Schools; **Kenneth L. Weir,** director of school-community relations for North Penn School District; and **Nick L. Goble,** PSBA assistant executive director.

**Lynn H. Mannion,** PSBA publication services director, coordinated the project. She edited, excerpted and revised the material derived from the association's award-winning public relations guidebook — *Schools-Community: Guidelines for Effective Communication* — and was responsible for all design and production activities. Typesetting, layout and cover design were completed by **Patrice Ruth,** PSBA typesetter/graphic designer.

Other resources are identified in each article. The association is grateful to all who have assisted in the production of this handbook for Pennsylvania's principals.

Joseph V. Oravitz
PSBA Executive Director

# Preface

School superintendents and effective school boards know that good communication policies start at the top. Without their strong commitment, the dynamics of management and public relations can flounder dramatically.

But there is no question that the most effective component of a school district's public relations program is at the building level. The moment of truth occurs at the schoolhouse door and primarily in the principal's office.

The principal is the person that makes things happen — through people and with people. The principal and staff will determine whether parents are "turned on or turned off." It's at the building level that the community is either "welcomed or ignored." It's here that the child is motivated to learn or falls victim to indifference.

While the principal cannot be a "doer of all things," research on effective schools clearly points to the results of school leadership and building-level activities.

Perhaps the "good news" about education is best told to parents and taxpayers by the students themselves. Educational achievement — clearly stated, supported and measured, holding the school accountable for results — is perhaps the best public relations program a school can have.

Yet that may not be enough today. Principals and their staffs have to go beyond the schoolhouse walls. They must go out of their way to work with their communities Schools need to build communications into a daily routine. Successful principals encourage a concerted effort to reach out and build nonthreatening, two-way understanding between parents, senior citizens, the busi-

ness community, social agencies, volunteers and all others who "belong" and "believe" in the public schools.

Such a process is a tall order involving both bringing parents and key communicators in and reaching out to those who can't make it in. Remember, every school has a public relations image. The question is whether it is planned or it just happens.

The principal and the school staff need to examine their buildings in terms of people and programs. The most effective way to do this is to re-evaluate (re-examine) the composition of your school at two levels — internal and external audiences.

Internal groups (people within the school family) are people directly associated with the school system. The list will look something like this:

- Teachers
- Custodians
- Secretaries
- Food service personnel
- Teacher aides
- Volunteers
- Bus drivers
- Librarians
- Crossing guards
- Nurses
- Guidance counselors
- Substitute teachers

The principal, by involving these people in structured programs, can develop long-range PR plans for the school. Such a process recognizes that professional and support staff are "co-workers" in education, both making a significant and valuable contribution to student success.

While working with external publics is important, sometimes principals overlook the need for internal communication or take it for granted. This can be a fatal mistake. If students, staff and parents don't promote or believe in success, then all the key communicators and advisory boards won't overcome a poor image generated by inept employees and a bickering school family.

Public relations is a term often used, but seldom defined. PR is often used by the media in a negative sense such as a "cover-up" for wrongdoing. However, in its broadest sense, public relations is "good work, publicly recognized." Perhaps PR for the principal and staff is simply a group of co-workers who say: "This is who we are, what we think about ourselves, what we want to do and why we desire your support."

Al Holliday, editor of the *Journal of Educational Public Relations*, advances a revised definition of school public relations driven toward student achievement. His comments make sense because that's what the schools should be about anyway — student learning.

Holliday notes that school public-community relations is a systematic function on all levels of a school system established as a program to improve and maintain optional levels of student achievement, and to build and maintain public support.

The function consists of communication with, and involvement of, internal and external publics in the school system. He suggests a series of processes and activities, in four categories, to:

- Promote a positive and challenging school climate that fosters student achievement and staff productivity.
- Encourage maximum parental involvement (at home and in the school) in their children's educational development.
- Build public knowledge about the successes and needs of the schools that may lead to informed public understanding and support.
- Involve citizens in cooperative learning practices and make them full partners in school-community learning.

Holliday's four-part analysis, while excellent for systemwide consideration, is an ideal roadmap for the building principal. This process allows thorough examination, by the principal or an advisory group, to evaluate what the school is currently achieving and in what direction it should move in the future.

Various suggestions and action programs specifically geared for the principal are contained in this book. These suggestions are not free of cost and will require staff and community commitment. But such expenditures, which can be supported, evaluated and measured, will contribute to student achievement and have long-term benefit for students.

Today's public school leaders need to remind themselves that as long as the school door opens, and youngsters walk through it, there is a communication responsibility for all school employees.

If we are doing a good job in the classroom, we should express our success every day. And the only way to do it is to make

student achievement and accountability to the public as high a priority as the teaching, learning and management processes.

Such a philosophy by the principal and the school staff will lay a solid foundation to make schools what they should be: warm, friendly, creative and productive places where children learn and are loved.

Nick Goble
PSBA Assistant
Executive Director

# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1 — Principal's role in public relations**

- A PR checklist for principals ..... 3
- How principals can promote community awareness ..... 9
- Principals must open doors ..... 13

**Chapter 2 — Communicating with internal publics**

- Building-level communication ..... 17
- Establish PR plans for every building ..... 23
- What's your school's CQ? ..... 31
- Positive PR for your school family ..... 35
- Strengthen communication ties with your substitutes ..... 39
- Staff recognition ideas ..... 43

**Chapter 3 — Getting and keeping community involvement**

- What should schools and parents expect from each other? ..... 53
- Getting and keeping parents involved ..... 59
- Making parent involvement work in small schools ..... 63
- Revitalizing PTA or parent groups ..... 67
- Six great ways to greet new students, parents ..... 71
- 50 ways to increase home-school cooperation ..... 75
- Helpful guidelines for advisory committees ..... 81
- Key communicators: An authorized grapevine ..... 87
- Seven steps to reach your nonparent publics ..... 91

**Chapter 4 — Using publications to share your story**

- School publications in your PR program ..... 99
- Four basic school publications ..... 109
- A guide to producing successful publications ..... 115
- Some suggestions for simple, clear writing ..... 119
- Be a better writer ..... 123
- Using words and pictures to tell the school story ..... 125

**Chapter 5 — Media relations for principals**

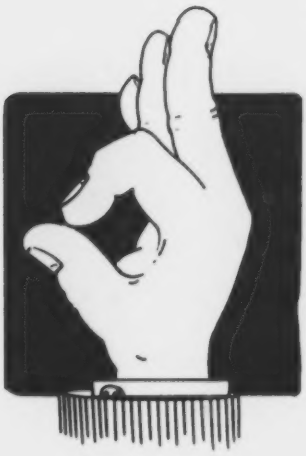
- Working with the news media ..... 131
- How to avoid mediaphobia ..... 145
- When things get hot: Crisis handling ..... 148

**Chapter 6 — Self-development resources**

- Managing time ..... 153
- Face-to-face communication is still the best ..... 157
- Tips on recalling names and faces ..... 159
- Ways to listen ..... 161
- How to write so you'll be understood ..... 165
- Four steps to success in public speaking ..... 171
- Writing good speeches and using platform notes ..... 177
- Self-help suggestions for public speaking ..... 185
- Organizing a speakers' bureau ..... 187
- Educational atmosphere-relationship study ..... 191

Chapter 1

# PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS



# A PR checklist for principals

**Evaluate past performance and prepare for a better communicating future.**

Principals play a prime role in closing the school-community information and confidence gap. Here's a checklist to measure if a principal is communicating effectively and showing sensitivity toward the students, staff and public.

- Do you encourage teachers at your school to send notes home commending children for the smallest of accomplishments?
- Do you remind your staff frequently to take five minutes at the close of the school day to review major points in instruction covered during the day?
- Do you encourage teachers at least once a month to channel information through your office which can be the source of a news story for the local press?
- Do you give a disgruntled parent a chance to "sound off," especially if he or she is angry or upset?
- Do you mail home a note of commendation for a child's noteworthy accomplishments?

- Do you belong to a community service club or organization?
- In the last month, has your school been a host for a minitour of senior citizens, real estate agents, service club members, parents who are not PTA officers, parochial school representatives, or others?
- During this school year, have you encouraged your teachers to offer or suggest a program involving their students and themselves for an educational presentation at a service club meeting or another community event?
- Do you encourage teachers and PTA members to write their legislators about proposed legislation or current conditions concerning education?
- Do you remind your staff often to involve parents in classroom activity?
- Do you occasionally drop in at the home of a child who has been having unusual difficulty of some kind?
- Do you encourage your staff to use community resource people for visits and talks in the classroom?
- Do you invite parents to forming an organized group which could help to provide protection for the school against vandalism?
- Do you invite elementary parents to take turns (by classrooms) having lunch with their children?
- Does your school have a "buddy" system or big sisters or brothers to help newcomers feel more at ease in their new school surroundings?
- Have you made arrangements to schedule coffee hours at least once a month in the home of someone in the community during the evening for parents who work to meet with you?
- Have you made arrangements to schedule coffee hours at least once a month at the school during the day so you can meet with small groups of parents (not PTA officers)?
- Do you have a bulletin board in a central hallway where newspaper articles concerning your school, staff and pupils can be displayed? (upper grade students could handle this.)

- Do you encourage PTA officers to schedule short educational presentations by small groups of students with their teachers at PTA meetings?
- Do you have a "Hall of Fame" bulletin board where photographs, brief biographies of former students, or newspaper accounts about them can be displayed?
- Do you insist that your office staff follow telephone techniques in a friendly, courteous, and understandable manner?
- Have you taken notice whether visitors to the office (parents or students) are acknowledged promptly and helped in a friendly, understandable manner?
- Are your outer office and your office neat and uncluttered?
- Have you taken any postgraduate courses recently in public relations, communications, or school-community relations?
- Do you commend teachers in a note to them concerning unusual, successful, or outstanding accomplishments?
- Do you have a full staff meeting at least once a year involving custodians, office personnel, food service employees, and teachers so they may all have an opportunity to meet and discuss common problems?
- Do you always communicate with your staff, students and parents well in advance of any major change or implementation of new decisions?
- Do you encourage teachers to participate in community activities?

## *Checklist to evaluate performance and preparation*

Lew Armistead of the National Association of Secondary School Principals cautions that it is far better to select a few proven communication ideas and gradually implement them in your building than to try to do everything next week. Evaluate your local communication needs, your school community, your financial

resources and the talents of your staff. The principal should be the best judge of communication needs and what will work best for the community.

Take pride in small successes and do not minimize the impact of your communication effort regardless of effectiveness of each attempt. Evaluate your past performance and prepare for a better communicating future by using the following NASSP checklist.

- ☐ Read a publication explaining school public relations.
- ☐ Explain the importance of school public relations to your staff.
- ☐ Identify the internal and external publics with which you deal.
- ☐ Identify the people who communicate for you.
- ☐ Evaluate how effective your school's morning announcements are and improve them if necessary.
- ☐ Establish a student communication council, if appropriate.
- ☐ Develop a staff bulletin.
- ☐ Schedule regular staff meetings to which all staff members are invited.
- ☐ Establish ways to inform volunteers.
- ☐ Conduct a search to determine the information needs of your various publics.
- ☐ Develop a school newsletter that is mailed home on a regular basis.
- ☐ Communicate to your staff that the best way to build a positive image is by doing a good job.
- ☐ Identify the perceptions people hold about your school.
- ☐ Develop a communication plan.
- ☐ Meet your district public relations professional, if there is one.
- ☐ Identify possible news stories at your school.
- ☐ Determine what would be appropriate public service announcements for your school and ask local radio and television people for help in producing them.
- ☐ Introduce yourself to the news director at community radio stations and inquire about possible news coverage.

- ☐ Determine if you are sending your staff bulletin to everyone who could benefit from reading it.
- ☐ Set up a network of key communicators.
- ☐ Establish a systematic program of sending students into the community to perform.
- ☐ Encourage student reporters to develop material about your school for the professional press.
- ☐ Prepare a speech you can use with civic groups and seek the chance to present it.
- ☐ Establish a way for people to have their questions about your school answered.
- ☐ Use your marquee or other such boards to communicate your important messages.
- ☐ Assure that telephones are answered and visitors greeted in a pleasant manner.
- ☐ Establish ways for positive telephone calls to be made to parents.
- ☐ Brainstorm with your staff accomplishments of the school and put those on paper.
- ☐ Print and distribute placemats featuring the value and accomplishments of schools.
- ☐ Evaluate the common sense you use in communicating with people.
- ☐ Meet the newspaper reporter or editor who covers your area.
- ☐ Set up ways to have letters to the editor written.
- ☐ Evaluate your communication efforts at the end of the year.

Well informed publics tend to be more supportive. They may not always agree with you, but they will appreciate the fact that you are willing to have them be aware of what you are doing even at the risk of their nonapproval. In the long run, it is a risk well worth taking when measured against the public relations value of a good and effective communications program.

# How principals can promote community awareness

**Little things make a difference in the way the public perceives you, and word gets around.**

Principals need to look at four key groups as they explore new ways to promote more community awareness about their schools: teachers, parents, community leaders and students. Often the simple, friendly efforts with school staff and patrons will make a difference. Here are some thoughts.

### With teachers

- Name a staff committee on school-community awareness.
- Prepare and provide for staff a map of the school neighborhood, showing streets, apartment complexes, businesses, churches, institutions.
- Prepare a profile of the school neighborhood, including: church affiliations, ethnic differences, political loyalties, age groups, home ownership/rental, business/commercial development, institutions, employment patterns, income, attitudes toward education, aspirations, and recreation patterns.

• Plan inservice training on the nature of the community and community developments.

• Ask the PTA to invite new teachers for a luncheon and a parent-conducted auto tour of the school neighborhood to see its housing patterns, recreation facilities, businesses and institutions.

### With parents

• Send a note home at the beginning of the year to introduce the teachers and say at what times each week each is available for conferences.

• Schedule "show and tell" days throughout the year. Students demonstrate work in a given class or subject while the teacher comments, then answers questions about it.

• Invite parents to staff meetings.

• Prepare a handbook for parents.

• Ask the PTA to call on parents new to the school neighborhood to welcome them and answer questions about the school.

• Make a home call every 10 days or so. This keeps you in touch with the community, helps parents regard you as "approachable" and sets an example for staff.

• Encourage counselors to make home calls.

• Use the telephone to report achievement. Assign each teacher to call one parent each week to report a student's accomplishments.

### With community leaders

• Ask the PTA to hold a reception for community leaders so they can mingle informally with teachers.

• Establish a Coffee Klatch day and time. Invite parents who are interested to drop in to talk informally about any concerns or suggestions. Occasionally invite neighborhood clergy or businessmen instead of — or with — parents.

• Invite neighborhood leaders to participate in school assemblies. Hold one assembly each year to interpret — and develop pride in — the neighborhood community.

• Use neighborhood people as co-sponsors — with teachers — of student clubs and activities.

• Hold joint meetings of student clubs with adult organizations in the neighborhood. Try student council and PTA, VICA and Kiwanis, Science Club and Garden Club, etc.

• Ask the PTA to invite representatives of student groups — student council, honor society, social studies classes — to PTA board and general meetings.

• Hold a business leaders' breakfast followed by a tour of the building to keep their impressions about schools up to date.

**With students**

• Encourage teachers to hold a weekly "talk time" to let students air their views.

• Be visible to students — in halls, lunch rooms, common areas.

• Hold a student-faculty tea once a month for informal exchange and strengthened relationships.

• Invite students in to react to new ideas or suggest new approaches.

• Use a questionnaire to survey student opinion on pressing questions.

• Set up a "rap room" where students can drop in on their free periods to air problems.

• Establish minicourses on community concerns. Invite community leaders as teachers.

• Use homeroom for planned programs to consider community issues.

• Encourage student groups — one class, one homeroom or one club — to have a monthly "luncheon" — inviting teachers to join them at a reserved table in the lunchroom.

*Excerpted from a brochure of the Akron (Ohio) public schools.*

# *Principals must open doors*

**One district's plan can be adapted to fit your school's needs.**

A principal is obliged to develop a local school-community relations program. In an ideal situation, this should be done in concert with the school district public relations program.

But what do you do if the district does not have a planned PR program? Many PR experts suggest that a principal should move ahead with the local school program while urging fellow principals and central administrators to work on developing a systemwide one.

An example of what can result from team planning is the PR program in a northeast Pennsylvania school district. Their overall district PR plan has been molded by 11 principals to fit the goals of each attendance area — in effect, each principal uses the district plan in a unique way to fit each school's need.

This plan, with adaptions as appropriate in each school, has provisions to:

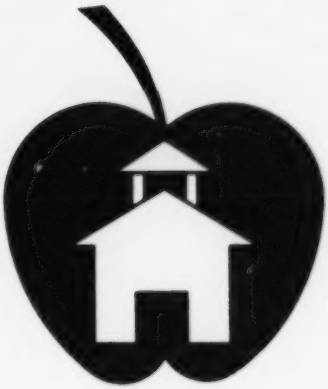
- Promote an "Open School" philosophy with the public, requesting only a scheduled appointment be made.
- Work with charitable organizations and community service clubs to help students learn about those less fortunate and show them how to help the unfortunate improve their circumstances.

- Use the school building in the best possible manner during nonschool hours. Help the representatives of outside organizations feel comfortable when asking for the use of the facilities.
- Provide a student/teacher project program for a school board meeting at least once a year.
- Observe National Education Week actively and visibly.
- Pursue ways to ensure better attendance at parent-teacher conferences.
- Provide interesting information written by high school students to a local daily newspaper.
- Recruit high school students as guides to aid visitors to the school.
- Recognize the efforts of individuals in the community on various school volunteer projects.
- Recognize the efforts of students and teachers for achievements above their regular performance.
- Allow teachers to compete for grants (school district funds) to help supplement unique educational offerings.
- Work closely with the organized parent/teacher/student groups to help them learn more about public education.
- Participate in district spelling bees for grades 4-8.
- Participate in academic games for grades 9-12.

*Contributed by **Nick Goble**, PSBA assistant executive director.*

Chapter 2

# COMMUNICATING WITH INTERNAL PUBLICS



# Building-level communication

**No one has a greater chance to build public understanding of and confidence in schools than the principal.**

It has been written . . . the teacher is the most influential single agent in developing public opinion concerning schools. The teacher is vital to the success of school public relations through instructional responsibilities and numerous face-to-face contacts. To many people, the teacher is the school. Student progress and a sound, dynamic instructional program are the keys to positive public relations. But, good instruction must be supplemented by a program of information and interpretation to help the public understand and appreciate the excellent job that is being done.

As true as these statements may be regarding the importance of the teacher in the educational effort, no discussion of building-level communications can be initiated without making reference to the one person who will determine the scope and success of a building-level communications effort — the principal. No one has a greater chance to build public understanding of and confidence in schools than the principal.

If the teacher is the school, the principal is the building . . . the "buck stops here" administrator with the onus of building-

level communications, internal and external, placed squarely on his or her shoulders.

**Publics**

Here we will look at the variety of methods utilized to establish a building-level communications program. But first we must understand the target of our communication effort or as it is called, the public. Who is the public? Upper Darby School District administrator Joseph Batory reminds us that, "There are more publics out there than you might think. The term public is deceptively simple. It makes us think of a mass of humanity, going shopping, riding elevators and escalators, working at desks and machines, heading into stadiums or crowding onto highways.

"The problem, however, from a communication standpoint, is that there are many different groups involved with any given situation. These groups do not all see things the same way. They are not all equally knowledgeable about education. They do not look at matters from the same point of view. The fact is that just as the classroom teacher individualizes instruction for the youngsters in a class, so the communicator should attempt to individualize to meet the informational needs of various groups of publics.

"Making a list of these publics is an essential part of the planning phase of any communication effort," adds Batory. "It immediately acknowledges the diversity of people you are trying to reach, and will inevitably produce a better plan."

There are many reasons to inform all of our public about education. For example: Taxpayers deserve to know how their dollars are spent. Parents entrust us with their most prized possession — their children — and they deserve to know how we are educating them. Community members should understand the achievements of their schools. Members of the school community, students, teachers and other staff members will be better citizens of that community if they are well-informed and kept knowledgeable about the programs that they are contributing to and in which they are key participants.

Although we have indicated that the principal should be the leader in the building communications effort, school communication has been called a family affair, and that certainly is an appropriate term when one looks at all the people who send messages

## The humane principal

The principal with the human touch is a good listener; but listening alone is not enough, it also requires hearing and doing.

The humane principal is a rational observer who sees what is going on and constantly plans for improvement.

The humane principal must also be able to communicate well with staff members. But, he or she also must be flexible enough to encourage staff initiatives and growth.

Capable principals are creative and innovative, but they also are accountable. Untested ideas have a way of haunting the unwary.

Principals with the human touch make decisions based on scholarly inquiry and research, but they also use common sense and the expertise of staff members. If a decision turns out to be a wrong one, the humane principal does not point an accusing finger at a staff member, absolving him or herself of the blame.

Humane principals are well-organized and enthusiastic about their schools.

The human dimension requires strong leadership skills; but more important, it requires sensitivity to teacher and student needs. Caring principals stand ready to help teachers solve the human equation in dealing with students but they do not second guess staff members' solutions any more than they like to be second guessed.

Considerate principals allow staff members autonomy in their respective classrooms by helping them maintain a strong self-concept. Teachers must not only have academic freedom, but also the freedom to develop style, versatility, and stability.

Understanding principals try to anticipate problems before they get out of hand, but they also remember that timing and team effort are important in solving most problems.

*Written by* ***Sharon A. Fasenmyer,*** *editorial consultant, Pennsylvania Association of Secondary School Principals and* ***Joseph Mamana,*** *editor of Pennsylvania Schoolmaster. Reprinted from* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations,*** *Vol. 7, No. 4, Winter 1985.*

for a school. Perhaps no other single activity involves such a cross section of individuals. Just as there are different publics that a school must inform, there are different sources of information. Surveys indicate that students, newspapers, school staff members, and parents of students are major sources of school news.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals lists parents as one of the most important publics, but also indicates that their numbers are decreasing. A decade ago, about half of the adults in the United States had children in school. Today only about one-fourth of the adult population has children in school. That means fewer people have a way to receive information about schools and education on a daily basis. While students are still a very important source of news, educators must reach out to other sources.

NASSP's Lew Armistead writes, "While surveys indicate that students, school staff members, parents and volunteers communicate messages for schools, you cannot turn that communication off and on like a water faucet. People will always send messages about your school. You can help make those messages more positive than negative, and that is the key to building an effective school communication program."

**Tools**

At the building level, communication can take a variety of forms which include each and every time principals answer the phone or open their office doors to a parent, student, staff member or a visitor from the community.

Specifically, we will attempt to identify a number of traditional methods that are used internally and externally to comprise a total building-level communication program.

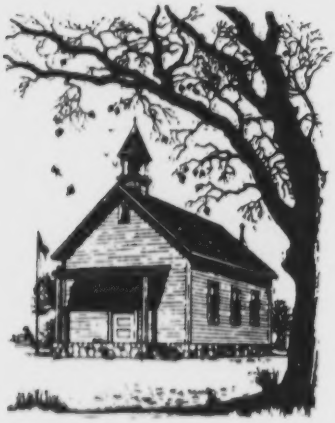
Internally, the list would include the faculty meeting, the staff newsletter, policy manuals, suggestion boxes, employee handbooks, public address announcements, television, bulletin boards, and a variety of informal meetings with the principal by students, teachers, supportive staff representatives and volunteers.

These "information sessions," "coffees," "fireside chats," etc., are most valuable for keeping the communication lines open and the air clear of rumors that can interrupt the smooth operation of the building.

Externally, the principal has a multitude of avenues to tell the story, beginning with the student-parent handbook which is probably the single most valuable tool in a long list of communication techniques. Others include the building newsletter, back-to-school nights, principal luncheons and coffees, parent conferences, the building marquee, open houses, parent communication councils, local newspapers, radio and cable television, a speakers' bureau utilizing administrators and teachers, a network of key communicators and letters to the editor. Also included are special celebrations such as American Education Week, which will open the doors of the school to the community and include displays of students' work throughout the community in areas such as malls, etc.

Communication at any level is a two-way street and the communicator always must be willing to listen as part of the truly effective communication effort. "Upward communication" making use of feedback and input from students, teachers, other staff members and parents can lead to a positive and productive communication effort.

This entire process is very people oriented and the more people are involved directly, face-to-face, the more productive all these various methods of communication are going to be for the principal and others involved in the process. Many of the methods that have been identified address the problem of the lack of feasibility of direct contact with all of the publics and therefore there are a number of items suggested that allow for indirect contact on a general basis.



# Establish PR plans for every building

**Here are guidelines for establishing PR plans at the elementary and secondary levels, as well as tips on how to market your schools.**

Every successful school district must have not only a districtwide public relations plan, but also a PR plan for every building in the district. These building-level plans will vary greatly, but also will contain many common elements. In the material that follows you will find suggested plans for an elementary and secondary school PR plan. These should be adapted by principals and staffs to meet their unique needs.

Every school, whether an elementary, middle, junior high or senior high school, vocational-technical facility, or village school, has a public relations program. The question is whether this program is planned or just happens.

### An elementary building-level PR plan

Many districts hold a school communication workshop for the

entire staff — both professional and support members — to involve them in developing a PR plan for the school year. Such a plan recognizes the many publics with which a school must communicate and includes both mass communication and interpersonal communication activities.

Any elementary building-level PR plan should include these 10 points:

**Staff communication and involvement.** A school's own staff is the key to good public relations. Excellence in the classroom must be the first priority, followed by a firm commitment to two-way communication between staff, administration, parents, students, teachers and the community.

**Parent communication.** Many traditional ways of communicating with parents are not working as well as they once did. Try these suggestions:

- **Parent workshops** — not only after school, but before school, in the evening and on Saturdays, and in locations convenient to parents.
- **Homework hotlines** — where parents can call on phone or radio at certain hours in the evening or on weekends to get assistance from teachers on homework problems or other questions.
- **Reach out.** Encourage "good news" calls from teachers to parents as well as those essential calls about concerns.

**Principal communication.** Use every opportunity possible to speak to parents and groups explaining the school program and the principal's role in it. Be close to your staff; be visible in the halls, take over a class now and then. Take an active role in the community.

**Publications.** Carefully plan your efforts to communicate with pictures and the printed word. Tell the school story through publications such as: a school handbook, newspaper, program and curriculum guide(s), annual report, school calendar, etc. Develop bilingual materials where needed.

**Regular school visitation program.** Invite parents and nonparents to the school to "see for themselves," and repeat the invitation often. Keep an open-door policy.

**Establish a speakers' bureau.** Have it include both school staff

and students. Develop a speech kit with slides about your school. Design a handout telling success stories of present and past students. Prepare a cassette program for use on local radio stations.

**Set up a system of key communicators.** Identify those persons in the school area who know what's going on in the community and put them to work on your team.

**Establish a citizens PR advisory committee.** Invite a group of parents, nonparents, neighborhood business leaders, staff and students to serve on a special committee to provide feedback and suggestions about your PR program.

**Student communication.** Students are key communication resources. Build in listening opportunities with students, be visible and valuable. Help students understand their PR role in the district's public confidence building efforts.

**Know your media.** Invite media representatives to the school. Make an appointment to visit them to learn how they would like to receive school news. Discuss ways you can help them get information about your school program and activities.

## PR programs for secondary schools

Secondary school principals frequently find the suggestion to develop a building PR plan is an awesome task on top of a schedule that already demands a 70-hour week! The suggestions below have come from secondary principals who have developed successful PR programs.

**Build on existing programs** — those offered by businesses and city groups. If companies in your area or other groups are sponsoring special events, involve the schools in these efforts. It is an opportunity to showcase students and staff, to offer space in the schools for the programs and build the school PR into an already successful program. Alert students, staff and parents to the event and seek ways they can take an active part.

**Have informal sessions** (luncheons, coffee) with small groups of staff, students, parents and community residents like business, church, and civic leaders. Consider career parents and schedule some sessions in the evenings, on weekends or "en route" to work in the morning.

**Provide training** in human relations and communication skills for professional and support staff members. Schedule "update meetings" to keep the staff informed about district programs as well as local building activities. Help them understand the critical role they play in building public confidence as representatives of the school district in the community.

**Use every opportunity to get out into the community and speak up for education.** Develop "good news" sheets about positive school happenings, awards, student achievements, staff honors, etc. Share these with the community, superintendent, board of education and media.

**Provide opportunities for staff members to visit "feeder schools"** and discuss programs with staff members there as well as students. Invite staffs and students from these schools to special visitation/orientation sessions at your school. (Don't forget to include parents.)

**Publish a newsletter** and see that it is distributed to staff, parents and community residents — businesses, churches, service clubs and your "feeder schools."

**Invite community service clubs** (Lions, Rotary, etc.) and the chamber of commerce to hold meetings on campus — encourage them to invite staff members and students to attend. Suggest programs and/or speakers which could be furnished by staff or students.

**Provide special workshops and discussion groups for parents.** Schedule some on specific topics such as drug abuse, discipline, family problem solving. Hold special sessions for single parents to meet and discuss mutual concerns.

**Schedule special Senior Citizen or Grandparent Days** with tours of the building, class visitation, participation and lunch with students and staff. Invite them to share their talents with the students. Have cards available for them to complete providing you with information about their areas of interest and willingness to serve as school volunteers.

**Develop rapport with the local media.** Be honest and provide them with the information they need. Send them tip sheets with story suggestions, and whom to contact for additional information. (Give school and home phone numbers.)

**Improve relationships with the business community.** Invite rep-

## Brainstorming can be helpful with your staff

Brainstorming is a simple process that elicits many ideas that can be useful to any project needing group consensus. The advantages, while there also may be pitfalls, include the following.

- All members of the group participate without immediate criticism. This encourages members who might be dominated or shy.
- A great number of ideas can be produced in a short period of time. Some will be totally useless. Others will be developed or combined to produce the one you may have been looking for.
- The amount of time wasted discussing ideas which most people feel should be abandoned is eliminated. This conserves valuable time for use by the group in more constructive ways.

Here are some tips to help you get the most out of an effective brainstorming session in a short amount of time:

1. The topic, problem or goal for the session is announced and explained as briefly as possible.
2. Participants have two or three minutes to consider the question.
3. One at a time, in rotation, each participant offers, in one short and complete sentence, his solution to the problem, or his idea for a project or action as desired.
4. All ideas are recorded by the group secretary.
5. There can be no criticism or discussion of any idea by any participant.
6. Participants may use previously mentioned ideas for springboards or for additional ideas themselves.
7. All participants should have a second or third idea in case their first solution or idea has already been mentioned.
8. After the group has been canvassed one or two times, the ideas are reproduced or reported for all members.
9. Ideas then can be ranked based upon criteria established by the group.
10. Discussion then can center around the top ideas.

resentatives to meet with you and staff members to discuss ways they can help. Tell them your needs and ask for their suggestions.

**Involve your staff, students and parents in a "Pride in our Schools" campaign.**

## Selling is part of the job

Several catch phrases have begun to come into school public relations programs. These include **"selling" and/or "marketing" schools.** To some principals these concepts seem directly opposed to all that schools should be doing. To others, however, these terms provide an emphasis for their total public relations programs, a way to enhance their activities, and an opportunity to assess the community's specific concerns about the schools and respond to them.

There's one elementary school principal in Minnesota who's not shy about selling himself, his school and all the people in it, because he's convinced that's the best way to get support from parents and the community.

"It's important for parents to know what their children do when they come to school," he explains, "and it's important that we keep parents continually informed about the activities in this building." And applying the skills he learned in writing, photography and press relations, he does just that.

For example, he sends home lots of certificates and awards to recognize progress made by students. Almost every day he visits reading classes in each grade and has students read to him. When they finish, he fills in and signs a "Reading Is Fun" bookmark for them to take home. And he makes a point the next day to ask those students if they showed it to their parents. "I want parents to realize I'm very concerned about the reading skills of their child," he explains. "Math Hall of Fame" cards are a similar means of helping motivate children to learn.

As a great believer in newsletters, the principal contributes regularly to the school district publications and also publishes a school monthly called *Jet Line.* He writes a lot of the stories, takes a lot of the pictures, and makes a point each month to single out a member of the staff for a special feature. And the extras don't wind up in the wastebasket. After the children get their copies to

take home, he drops the leftovers off at the local stores so the public can pick them up.

Local businesses regularly receive copies in the mail, as do former teachers and aides who live outside the district. It's a good way for them to keep in touch, he says. The *Jet Line* also is mailed to local senior citizens to keep them informed of the monthly lunches and other events scheduled just for them, like the annual Grandparents Day. And it also tells them how they can help in the schools, such as a special appeal for a volunteer to work with a first grader that was answered right after it appeared in the newsletter. A copy goes to families moving into the district, or those thinking about it when they visit the school. They also get a copy of the student handbook.

The handbook is another effort of the principal, carrying photographs he took himself of school activities. The school, in fact, has an impressive array of locally produced materials, including a handbook for substitute teachers (how many schools totally ignore those people?) and a 64-page booklet called "My Own Spelling Dictionary" that goes to each primary youngster. "This is your own book to use when you write," it says in the introduction. "Some words are already in the book to help you spell them correctly." There are many blank lines under each letter for the youngsters to fill in words as they learn them. A note in the front asks parents to "please take some time each week to review this book with your child. It will pay handsome dividends in your child's educational career."

As a missionary of school public relations at the school level, he contributes articles on his techniques to other publications. "Happygrams, newsletters, birthday cards, performance certificates, thank-you notes to parents and staff, special school events like our Grandparents Day celebration — these are the little things that make a difference in the way parents perceive our school. And when parents feel good about it, word gets around."

*Excerpted from* ***Alaska Guide to School Communications and Public Relations,*** *Alaska Department of Education, 1983.*

# What's your school's CQ?

**Little things do make a difference, including how you greet students and parents.**

Here's one test that should be administered at the start of the year, and instead of giving it, the school takes it. It's a CQ Test, and it's designed to determine a school's **Climate Quotient.** While it may not be any more decisive in its own right than a child's IQ, it's a good indicator of whether that school's a happy place in a supportive community or a disaster waiting to happen.

So get out your clipboard and start taking inventory. Forget for a moment the newsletters and awards assemblies and open houses. They're important, of course, in creating a positive climate, but you'll find that it's the little things that can kill you. The test isn't multiple choice or true-false, and you won't need an essay to come up with the right answers.

• **How do you answer the phone?** Is the voice friendly or condescending? How many times does the phone ring before it's picked up? Are callers always put on hold, and how many times are they transferred around the building before they make contact?

• **How do you greet visitors in the hall?** Are they confronted like intruders or welcomed like members of the family? Do signs

warn them they'll be prosecuted for trespassing or give them clear directions to the office?

• **How do you greet visitors in the office?** Does somebody look up right away with a smile or must they stand interminably behind an intimidatingly high counter?

• **How do you greet new students and their parents** on their first day? Are they just thrown into the arena or does somebody make an effort to say hello? If the principal is too busy during the day, how about a phone call home in the evening to show there's a caring human being in charge of the school?

• **How do you welcome and orient new employees?** How they are treated on their first day can color their attitude about their job for years. And that doesn't mean just teachers. How about crossing guards and playground aides? Is there an effort to make them feel part of the family too?

• **How do you report a child's progress — or lack of it?** Do the parents have to wait for a cold quarterly computer printout to find out how their children are doing, or does the school make an effort to tell mom and dad personally when their kids do something bad — or good? And how about the "average" kid who earns neither a commendation or a warning? Isn't it worth the effort to remind the parents you know the kid's alive?

• **How do you let the staff know what's going on** in the building and the district? "Family meetings," involving support staff as well as faculty, are great morale boosters and rumor squelchers.

• **Are there regular opportunities for feedback in the building?** It's great to keep staff, students and parents informed, but isn't it just as important to seek their observations and contributions? At the end of a PTA or community meeting, do you ask for comments or suggestions on the next one? Encourage feedback from home — if you have to send out questionnaires to get it — and give the faculty a chance, even if it has to be anonymously, to offer suggestions.

• **How do you involve other people in the life of the school?** Do you reach out to local businesses, senior citizens and neighbors in addition to parents and make a positive effort to make them feel a part of the school community? Do you take advantage of their expertise to strengthen the school program?

• **How worthwhile are your parent-teacher conferences?** Are your teachers as uptight as the parents, or do you prepare them for the experience? And do you take advantage of the opportunity to pass out informational material and solicit the parents' views about the school and its program?

• **How do you schedule school functions involving parents and the community?** Do you hold parent-teacher conferences or kindergarten roundup weekdays from 9 a.m. to noon and 1-3 p.m. because that's convenient for you, or do you tailor hours for the convenience of working parents?

• **Do you know what to do when the media calls?** Is the principal clear on what to say in the event of an emergency? Is there a formal crisis plan outlining everybody's responsibilities, or is the staff expected to wing it and risk a distorted story and panic in the community?

• **Do you have a student and parent handbook** to interpret rules and set the tone for the school? If you do, is it a genuinely helpful book, telling readers who to contact with problems, or is it a principal's flowery greeting followed by gloom and doom: "You will be suspended IF. . . "?

• **Do you publish a newsletter — for the community, not just the parents?** And assuming you do, have you taken the time to read it and ask yourself, "If I hadn't written this myself, would I be interested in it at all?"

• **Do you provide for recognition of students and staff?** There are dozens of ways to praise people and let them know you care for them. Handing out a "Super Student" badge or "Teacher of the Month" ribbon costs little but it inspires everybody to work harder.

• **How do you introduce new ideas to the kids, the staff and the parents?** Too much too fast can cause resentment and lose the whole program. Involving everybody in the planning and implementation can guarantee a smooth transition.

• **Do you ignore the kids when they leave the school?** Exit interviews or questionnaires can be real eye-openers. Ask students when they graduate or move away what it was really like in the school and what they think can be done to improve it. And listen to the answers.

• **How do you evaluate the performance of teachers and other staff members?** This is a delicate matter, to be sure, but do you walk away from it and concentrate only on kids' report cards? For the sake of the children, shouldn't staff members be commended if they do well and criticized — and helped — if they don't?

• **What do you do to put some pride in the place?** School spirit does a lot more than sell football tickets. You may think catchy slogans are a little hokey, but they give students and staff something to rally around. And when everybody agrees on what your school stands for, it can raise sagging morale and make a world of difference in the entire school operation.

Be honest now — how did you do? Obviously, there's no passing grade, and you probably won't find out if you failed until you're confronted by a rebellious community or a sullen staff. So while you focus your attention, as you should, on academic excellence, never lose sight of the fact that it's the little things that can make the difference.

*Reprinted from* ***It Starts in the Classroom,*** *© September, 1985, National School Public Relations Association.*

# Positive PR for your school family

**The principal is responsible to inform all the school's publics and be willing to listen as part of truly effective communication.**

A management system that is warm, caring and supportive, much like that of a healthy family, can lead to a vibrant, healthy and progressive school.

Loyalty and support among the staff, students, administration and parents can be accomplished through a process of placing the integrity, ambitions and successes of each individual member of the school family as essential to the success of the program.

The principal must build the program on some basic assumptions:

- Every teacher wants to do a good job.
- Every student wants to succeed.
- Every parent wants his or her child to succeed.
- The staff, faculty, students and community will take pride in their school if they have a sense that they as individuals have a responsibility to it.

- The school is a community facility and belongs to the community . . . not a bureaucracy.

Encourage the staff and community members to be in charge

## Principals' commitment

The first item on any principal's agenda must be winning a commitment to education from teachers, support staff members, students, parents, nonparents and community leaders. Here are 10 steps to help principals win a commitment to education.

1. Make sure that everyone involved knows what schools are doing well, what the problems are and what is being done to solve them.
2. Agree that doing a good job is the most basic obligation — constantly pursue excellence in education.
3. Make sure that people have positive personal experiences with their schools.
4. Improve staff morale; tell staff members when they do a good job.
5. Become politically involved.
6. Take the public's concern about discipline seriously and work to address the problem. Have a plan and communicate it to your publics.
7. Stop fighting among yourselves and start building coalitions to support quality education.
8. Use every means at your command to get today's nonparents involved with their schools.
9. Involve the business community in efforts to make good schools better.
10. Establish two-way communication with all school audiences. Educators must be attuned to what the community is saying and thinking about their schools.

A commitment to communicate more effectively and an organized communication plan are critical if schools are to gain community support.

of various programs, such as tournaments, clubs, ceremonies and social events.

Encourage the students to take an active role in the operations of the school. An active student government is essential.

The principal should never take anything for granted. One must always be totally in control of the operations but, hopefully, the principal can maintain a "behind the scenes" role. Capitalize on the positive with every opportunity but subtly and surely defuse the negative.

Communicate with the community in a positive manner. Be honest and straightforward with statements but concentrate on the positive. Speak to the problem but include suggestions on how the problem can be corrected.

When unsatisfactory progress reports are mailed to the parents, the report should be constructive in nature. Make positive suggestions as ways to improve and ask for the parents' help.

Encourage community use of the facilities. The community will be more considerate toward supporting the school if they "personally" benefit from it. The gym, for example, should be used by the community on weekends, evenings and in the summer.

Remember, the secretaries, cooks, custodians, maintenance people and other support staff probably have a greater "pipeline" to the community than any other members of the school family. Involve them in the overall school operation, let them know that the school needs them and share with them the credit for its successes.

If you demonstrate a pride in the community and a love for its children, the community and its children will return the same in kind.

*Reprinted from Alaska Guide to School Communication and Public Relations, Alaska Department of Education.*

# Strengthen communication ties with your substitutes

**Regular communication with your district's substitute teachers can increase loyalty and establish a reputation that will attract top new substitutes.**

School administrators should make an effort to keep their substitute teachers informed about school activities, changes in policy and upcoming school events.

The substitute should know if there have been disciplinary problems in the school in recent days, or if the high school they may work in soon is in the process of being evaluated by an accrediting association, or if parent volunteers will be working in the classrooms with them.

One method for keeping substitutes informed is by adding their names to the mailing lists for internal newsletters, the report of the public board meeting, new publications, school newspapers and the school district's community newsletter.

## A dozen helpful hints for substitutes

- Develop your own "survival kit." Teachers do not always have time to leave plans.
- Have a neat appearance — it will encourage respect.
- Relate to the students in a positive manner.
- Bring with you an attitude of love for the students.
- Combine decisiveness with a sense of humor.
- Treat each student as an individual.
- Expect the best from all students.
- Carry out discipline privately.
- Follow through on what you promise.
- Remain objective.
- Don't make meaningless threats.
- Be patient.

Other suggestions offered to substitutes:

- Use a pleasant, but firm approach to quickly establish rapport with the students.
- Adhere to the established classroom routine.
- Uphold school rules and regulations, and maintain daily attendance records.
- Follow the designated lesson plan.
- Do not release a student from school without the permission of the principal.
- Acquaint yourself with one of your neighbor teachers.
- Be cautious about administering punishments, and at no time administer corporal punishment. If you need help in handling a discipline problem, consult the principal or the assistant principal.
- Never administer mass punishment.
- Use the seating chart. If there is none available, quickly sketch your own.
- If money has to be collected for one reason or another, deposit it at the office as soon as possible.

Another way to communicate with substitutes is through a "substitute teacher handbook." The manual's contents should include an introduction telling how to qualify, how to apply to the district and a paragraph or two on what is expected of substitutes while they are on duty. For example, one school says in its handbook that:

> The standards are high for our staff teachers in this district; our substitute teachers are expected to adhere to these same standards of excellence. In this district, substitute teachers are considered an important part of the educational program. We ask that while you are with us, you assume the same responsibilities and privileges as regular members of our faculty.

Other areas that could be covered in the handbook would be information on where to report for work, suggestions for a smooth day in the classroom, helpful hints on "surviving the day," a map of the district, the school calendar and information about salary and benefits.

Keeping substitute teachers informed and treating them as a part of the school family will help your school keep its valued substitutes and establish a reputation that will attract top new substitutes. This can be important to the school because "good" substitutes are at a premium in many areas of the country.

Communicating is, of course, a two-way process and many principals ask their substitutes to evaluate their day, the school and to offer suggestions which may be helpful to other substitutes.

Other than postage and a few hours of a principal's time, it costs very little to keep substitute teachers informed. If your school isn't already communicating with them, give it some thought. It's a small investment that will pay dividends for many years to come.

*Contributed by* ***M. Larry Litwin,*** *former public information director for the Washington Township Public Schools (NJ) and now reporter for KYW Newsradio, Philadelphia.*

# Staff recognition ideas

**Ideas to thank, praise and reward employees and volunteers for their accomplishments.**

A number of school districts represented by membership in the Pennsylvania and National School Public Relations associations was surveyed concerning programs and activities they might have in recognizing staff members for job and personal achievements, dedication and years of service. Following is a summary of responses to the questions asked in the survey.

***Question 1*** **— Ways your organization recognizes employees on a regular basis for performing their job responsibilities satisfactorily.**

- Columns written in the school district's internal and external newsletter.
- Recognition by the school board of employees gaining state, regional or national honors. (Certificates and plaques were the more popular means used for recognition.)
- A campaign was designed for employee recognition using one month to honor teachers, one to honor support employees and one to honor administrators.

- Teacher Appreciation Week. Several techniques could be used — chosen teachers could receive monetary awards or gifts from businesses; letters could be sought and published from adults and students about teachers who most influenced their lives.
- "Good Apple" awards presented to outstanding employees and volunteers. Nominations can be solicited from the schools and community with up to three persons in each category selected monthly by two committees (volunteers and staff). Recipients receive a certificate and lapel pin from the school board. Their names are publicized in the media and in staff publications.
- "Distinguished Classroom Teacher" awards in three categories: elementary teacher, secondary teacher, beginning teacher. Nominations can be made by anyone and selections are made by a committee of several teachers and one administrator.
- Newsmaker recognition. Recipients are employees who have been honored in a media news story for some achievement. They are termed "achievers" and receive a copy of the newspaper article and a congratulatory note contained in a special folder.
- Promote an "Employee Recognition Evening" in conjunction with recognizing school district employees who have retired and those with lengthy years of service. Certificates of recognition can be awarded and suitably worded.
- "Appreciation Day" in the spring to say "thank you" to teachers, administrators, custodians, cafeteria workers, secretaries, bus drivers, parent volunteers, student crossing guards and the school board. Suggested are telephone calls, notes, flowers, donuts and coffee, pot luck lunches, etc. Some ideas were notes from the superintendent, packs of "Lifesaver" candies to crossing guards and instructional aides, flowers to secretaries, goodies in nearly every office, notes of appreciation to school board members, etc.
- Certificates of Merit for achievements on local, state, regional and national levels in areas of education or outside interests.
- A Staff-Community Breakfast to kick-off a school year. Community residents, local politicians and parents involved in school organizations join with the teaching and administrative staffs in an opening day continental-style breakfast. A brief program with addresses by the school board and teacher association presidents and superintendent follows. The costs are shared by the district,

## Notes and cards

- A thank-you note can be used by principals to recognize special contributions by faculty and staff. It can also be used to send to parents and members of the community who have given support in an activity.
- When staff members are observed performing in an unusual way deserving recognition, write them a sunshine note acknowledging their excellent work or activity.
- Specially designed notes are sent to individuals to congratulate or thank them. Another card can be used for any occasion.
- The principal writes personal appreciation letters to staff members on letterhead and places a copy in the permanent personnel file.
- The principal has a personal (as contrasted to district) letterhead and uses it for personal letters of thanks and commendation.
- Send personal, handwritten "thank-yous" for special contributions or outstanding service.
- If an article about or by a staff member appears in a newspaper, magazine or newsletter, it is clipped and sent to the person in a special "You're in the News" folder.
- Special note cards are sent for illness, bereavement, etc.
- Preprinted notes get there and promptly . . . too often we mean to thank, praise, etc., and a week is gone before we see the individual. A quick note in the mailbox says it and can be shared with others.
- "Flutterby" notes are kept on the teachers' or staff members' desks. The purpose is to use the flutterby notes to share real successes, progress made or special happenings with the principal.
- Personalized carbon-treated memos can be sent to acknowledge a special contribution or event. The original is sent to the individual and the carbon is placed in the files.

teachers' group and parent groups. The event can help set a positive climate for the upcoming year.

***Question 2* — Ideas for recognizing employees for outstanding "off the job" performance such as community volunteering, service club participation, etc.**

- Local chambers of commerce and other organizations annually present awards to school employees who perform outstanding work in the community.
- Employee recognition dinner to honor those who are retiring, who have had lengthy years of service, and who have gained prestige by outstanding community work.
- School board honors those employees who have achieved high offices and honors in professional organizations.
- Superintendent uses special forms to send handwritten notes to the employees for outstanding community work, as well as cards of condolences and others as needed.
- One school district promotes "Winner of the Week" awards and citations to recognize outstanding community service by the staff members.
- Staff newsletter recognizes the staff for honors received or offices held in service clubs, state and national organizations.
- Distinguished Achievement Awards are presented to the students and teachers at school board meetings. Recipients are selected for achievements outside the schools.
- Staff members achieving outside honors are recognized in human interest stories in the public media and in district publications.
- One school district recognizes outstanding achievements by the staff members by having articles published in professional publications, in addition to local newspaper and newsletter coverage.

***Question 3* — Recognition of employees at intervals during their employment — such as every five years, every 10 years, etc. How do you go about it?**

- Certificates for 20-25-30 years of service are signed by the board president and the superintendent and presented by the principal or department head at a school assembly. The 30-year employees are presented with a gold-plated pin at a dinner in May.

- The employees at each school or facility with the longest tenure or service are given a packet during American Education Week. Included are a name tag with years of service noted; an enameled logo pin with ribbons proclaiming, "Teachers Are Tops" or some other suitable wording; a certificate; a letter; and a specially inscribed pen.
- Bus drivers are recognized for years of accident-free service.

## Special occasions

### Birthdays

- A large birthday calendar is displayed monthly in a prominent place with employees' birthdays noted. Usually, a special time is set aside each month for a short "birthday coffee klatch."
- Administrators keep a file of staff birthdays and writes personal notes to each.
- Staff birthdays are listed in internal newsletters.
- A list of all birthdays for the year or a monthly list is sent to all staff members.

### Anniversary of service

- A note of a personal thank you is sent on the employee's anniversary with the school district by the administration or by an immediate supervisor.

### Retirement

- Each retiring staff member receives an award or certificate from the school board officially recognizing the contribution of service to the organization.
- High-quality cast bronze plaques are presented in a public setting to individuals who have contributed 5, 10, 15, 20 or 25 years of service.
- Retirement dinners are held for those employees who are retiring. In some instances, they are hosted by the school district while in others, the school district and employee unions share the costs and sponsoring.

Special increments in pay are given to employees with 15 and 20 years service.

- Employees completing 15 years of service are awarded a service pin at an appropriate ceremony. The pin is presented by the employee's immediate supervisor.

***Question 4*** **— What types of recognition are given employees when they retire?**

- Retirees are honored at a special dinner hosted by the superintendent and school board each May. Guests of the retirees are invited. Retirees are given a certificate, pin and flower, and are not charged for their dinner.
- Receptions are held for those people who retire. Usually employees are given a plant, or a check (money collected from fellow employees) or a plaque. At the end of the school year, the school board honors retirees with a certificate and refreshments are served (usually at a board meeting).
- An annual dinner is held to honor all retirees and employees cited for outstanding service. The superintendent reads a human interest account on each employee. They are given certificates, school pins with the district logo and "Gold Card" passes for use at school district-sponsored activities such as athletic contests, concerts, etc.
- A year-end party is held for retirees to which their supervisors and central office personnel are invited. Certificates of appreciation are presented at a brief program, and comments are offered by the board president, superintendent and a designated retiree (speaking for all those being honored.)
- A spring social is held at a country club or restaurant. Retirees receive a plaque from the district and gifts from the education association. A letter is sent to retiring employees by the superintendent in which he recognizes special attributes and contributions to the district by the retirees.
- A retirement banquet is held with the cost shared by the school district and employee unions. Retirement plaques are presented to all employees retiring.

***Question 5*** **— Recognition of volunteers for contributions they make to the schools and students.**

- A special luncheon is held to honor business people who have worked with the schools. A reception is held for outstanding volunteers.
- A volunteer coffee klatch and recognition program is held each spring. A renowned speaker is engaged, volunteers of the year are named, and volunteers with the highest number of hours are recognized.
- "Partners in Education" certificates are presented to volunteers.
- A special handbook about volunteer duty is presented to each volunteer; special recognition of volunteer services is given by the school board; individual parent-teacher groups recognize volunteers, and individual birthday recognition is noted in personal letters to volunteers from an administrator. Mention of volunteers and their contributions is noted in a school district newsletter distributed in the community.

***Question 6* — Any other ideas or suggestions for staff recognition?**

- An "Employee Suggestion Box" is used with cash awards based on realized savings given.
- Coffee with the superintendent on a May afternoon for employees who have previously retired. It includes teachers, custodians, administrators, food service workers, bus drivers, aides, clerks and others.
- Principals are made aware of their roles and responsibilities in recognizing staff. This is important and should come from the superintendent "loud and clear."

*Excerpted from the* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations,*** *Vol. 8, No. 1 (1985), and from presentations made at workshops of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association.*

Chapter 3

# GETTING AND KEEPING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

# What should schools and parents expect from each other?

**Educational responsibilities of the school and parents are interrelated. Both need to take an active role in fulfilling their obligations.**

**What should schools expect from parents?**

1. Courtesy and understanding.
2. That parents seek out, read and explain all school rules and regulations to all of their children.

- That parents inform each child of what will happen if the rules and regulations are not followed.
- That parents encourage their children to follow these rules and regulations.
- That parents contact school officials about: rules and

regulations that they don't understand; changes that they would like to see in rules and regulations and why; better solutions to problems that they might have are not provided by the rules and regulations.

- That they confer with school officials whenever there is a problem with their child.

3. That parents read all progress reports and explain them to the child and ask proper questions of the child.

- That they seek questions concerning their child's progress.
- That they seek out reasons for and solutions to poor academic achievement or behavior of their children.

## 10 commandments for communicating with parents

1. Make every day a positive one for as many students as possible.
2. Use language lay people can understand.
3. Know what's going on where you work.
4. Improve your school; don't criticize without trying to overcome a problem.
5. Get to know parents and others you deal with as soon as possible.
6. Listen to the community and dispel rumors.
7. Know your field; keep up with journals; be professional.
8. Set high standards for yourself and expect colleagues to do a good job.
9. Make the first communication with parents a positive
10. In dealing with parents, tell them about their children the way you would want to be told about your children.

*Contributed by **Dr. Donald Gallagher,** professor of communication, Glassboro State College (NJ).*

- That parents seek out and cooperatively work with school officials whenever physiological and other services are indicated for their child.

4. That parents **frequently** check their child's records and become involved in all aspects of the child's development.

- Parents who do not know what courses their child is taking, who the teachers are, and how well the child is doing cannot fulfill their obligation as parents.
- Parents who do not periodically consult with their child's teachers and administrators cannot fulfill their obligation.

5. That each parent know something about what his child is learning in school by doing the following:

- Checking the texts and materials which are brought home.
- Periodically asking about and seeing homework assigned and prepared by the pupil.
- Asking to see all schedules, syllabi, etc. given to the child.
- Asking about all tests and results given to the child.

6. That parents exercise their right to contact the appropriate school officials whenever the need is seen by the parents or their children.

7. That parents check and make sure that information about proper procedures is available and that the child understands these procedures and is protected and served by them.

**What should parents expect in their child's school?**

1. Courtesy and professionalism by school officials and all members of the school staff.

2. Prior knowledge of rules and regulations for running the school:

- Which are explicit as to their intent.
- Which detail punishments if they are violated so that any student or parent could understand them.
- Which have built-in fairness and consistency in their application.
- Which provide a chance for students and parents to be

heard when there are conflicting interpretations or application of the rules and regulations.

- Which provide a chance for parents to be involved.
  - — To be contacted when the child is in trouble.
  - — Information on what the trouble is should be made available to them, i.e., what rule has been broken.
  - — Information on what is to happen should be made known to the parent and the child.
  - — Information on any possible appeals if a determination has been made.
  - — Information on what parents must do to settle the problem — if they must appear with the child at a hearing or a conference concerning the problem, or the relative seriousness of the incident at the time they are contacted.
- Rules and regulations should be available to parents as well as to students.

3. Progress reports:
   - Normal grade period reporting.
   - Reporting when a child is having: academic problems — this should be done prior to failure; adjustment problems — this should be done prior to trouble, if possible; discipline problems.
   - Psychological reports: a full explanation to the parent is mandatory; interpretation of results to parents is a necessity in language that they can understand; access to psychological service people and to their child's records is a must.

4. Availability of all the child's records:
   - Grades, notes from staff on student evaluations, psychological records, test scores and interpretations of test scores, discipline records, and all other kinds of data should be made known to the parent by the school.
   - Time to discuss these with teachers, special service people and administrators must be made available to parents.

5. Knowledge of their child's instruction:

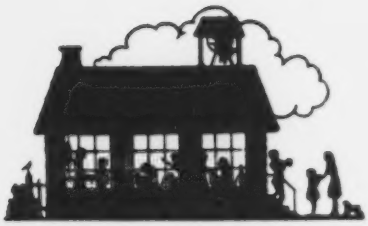
- What they will be exposed to in the way of: books, curriculum, staffing, schedules, other school activities, testing.
- Features of their school's physical facilities such as: a right to visit their school at any time with or without invitation; a right to see programs and facilities in their schools in action.

6. Knowledge of whom they should contact if they have a problem and how they can reach the proper person: title, responsibilities and accessibility of the person; organizational chart so the parents will know how to go through the proper channels without being diverted to another area.

7. Proper procedures for the following:

- Emergency situations — health, weather, other.
- Parent-teacher conferences.
- Advisory roles guaranteed by local, state or federal law.

*Excerpted from the Parent Involvement Handbook, produced by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in cooperation with the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association, 1984.*



# Getting and keeping parents involved

**Parents need to know you need their help, to feel appreciated and to understand how the decisions are made.**

• **Parents need to know you really want and need their help.** Sending out a notice saying that may not be convincing. Personal contact works much better. It is more difficult to say "no" to a telephone request than it is to one presented on a crumpled paper carried home by a child. Furthermore, this personal contact can help ensure a broadly based committee instead of one comprised of the people who volunteer for everything.

• **Parents need to know the scope of a committee or project's purpose,** the time commitment expected of them, and that what they are doing is important to the school and their children. This should be included in the recruitment effort to attract members.

• **Parents must be convinced that their services, advice and recommendations will be thoroughly considered** when decisions are reached.

• **Parents need to feel that their efforts are appreciated.** In ad-

dition to the simple thank you, show concern about transportation and child care for those attending meetings. Publicize names and committee appointments, plan appreciation dinners or other activities, include members' photos in yearbooks or news articles.

• **Parents need to understand the process used for decision making.** Not all parents have experience in reaching group decisions and the processes necessary to accomplish this. If parents are expected to be true partners in decisions, the process (and the administrator) should not be allowed to intimidate or dominate them. Prepare everyone for mistakes, broken communications, upsets, setbacks, temporary lags in action.

### Special considerations

• Not all parents had a happy experience with their own schooling and may need strong encouragement to return to a school building.

• A more neutral setting than a school may work better — church, community center, etc.

• Language may be the source of another problem — some parents feel that they do not express themselves well and will be further intimidated by "educationese" jargon.

• Non-English or limited English-speaking parents face other barriers. Send invitations out in the language they use or have a person who speaks their language call them. Be sure to have bilingual people at all meetings so that parents can express themselves in languages they speak.

• Some parents expect immediate solutions or quick responses to recommendations. It may be wise to provide some skills in group decision making or divide the work or areas of concern into small sections so that success can be seen in some areas while others continue to be studied.

### Planning for parent involvement

Establishing meaningful partnerships with parents and other citizens in the community is best achieved by schools which plan their parent involvement efforts. The planning process involves four basic steps: analyzing, action-planning, implementing and evaluation.

**Step 1: Analyzing**

- Survey community attitudes and interests.
- Learn as much as you can about key people, procedures, problems, programs and policies.
- Determine how parents are currently being involved in your schools.
- Identify new ways parents can be involved.

**Step 2: Action-Planning**

- Develop a comprehensive parent involvement policy.
- Prepare a parent involvement plan, outlining goals, objectives and strategies.
- Determine resources needed to supplement the existing channels for parent involvement.
- Analyze and develop new channels. Establish a procedure for using them effectively.
- Get community members involved in the planning.
- Set priorities.

**Step 3: Implementation**

- Target programs to different audiences, making sure you tailor them to meet different needs.
- Get school staff members involved. Make them aware that parent involvement is a school priority.
- Set timelines and meet them. Make everyone aware of your deadlines and goals so as to work within the boundaries you've set.
- Find ways to highlight parent involvement in newsletters, news articles, recognition programs and other communication avenues.

**Step 4: Evaluation**

- Listen. What is being said and how are people reacting to your communication efforts?
- Survey. Ask people, through planned means, their opinions and reactions to what you have been doing.
- React to the feedback you obtain. Is it justified? What does

it tell you about the effectiveness of your program? How can you use this feedback to improve your program?

- Be honest with yourself. Are you accomplishing your objectives? Are you using your goals to chart your course?

*Excerpted from the Parent Involvement Handbook, produced by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in cooperation with the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association, 1984.*

# Making parent involvement work in small schools

**Small schools can have special relationships with parents and community groups.**

In spite of limited time, financial resources and personnel, even small schools can offer comprehensive, effective parent involvement programs. Small schools can take advantage of their size to get parents involved and generate community support. In a small school, the program can take on a more personal quality, and schools can set up special relationships with parents and community groups. Here are a few tips.

- Plan to have an ongoing program.
- Compile a list of current parent involvement activities.
- Give priority to groups of parents and other people in your community you want to involve first.
- Identify what orientation and training programs need to be developed.
- Encourage staff to be an integral part of the community.
- Work closely with local media — radio stations, newspapers,

cable television companies. Don't forget weekly papers. Larger dailies are more inclined to cover larger districts.

- Make schools available for community use.
- Promote a "we care" attitude.
- Listen to people.
- Consider the following parent involvement opportunities:

**Open Office Hours.** Being accessible to parents is important, and the "open office hours" concept demonstrates it. Even in the smallest schools there is a feeling that the average citizen cannot communicate directly with the principal.

**What's for Breakfast?** Invite selected community leaders, parents, nonparents, business leaders to join the principal and staff for breakfast and an informal agenda. Share information about the school and its needs. Ask for questions and suggestions.

**Neighborhood Walk.** Visit the neighborhoods of the school during the summer with various teachers and parents. Dress informally and meet those people who are working in their yards or enjoying summer evenings. Start conversations about the community and the school.

**Hats Off.** Express appreciation to parents who are always doing those little extra things to benefit the school. Professional and support staff members can nominate parents who've been helpful or other community members who've been actively involved in the school. Establish an award system which could include a certificate presented at a board meeting, a picture in the local newspaper, or an interview on the local television or radio program.

**SWAP Day.** Suggest that students at the secondary level take a day off from school with your blessing and invite a parent or neighbor (senior citizen) to attend class instead. If you don't want to dismiss the students, ask them to bring the adult along with them on SWAP Day. A twist to this is to invite business leaders to SWAP with a teacher for a day — the teacher try his or hand at the office or business activity and the business leader at teaching. You'll be surprised at the new respect with which the business leaders view the schools, and your staff members will have a new appreciation for business.

**Key Communicators.** Identify those parents who have their "fingers on the pulse" in your school community, those persons who talk with large numbers of people and are usually the first to know of potential problems. Get to know these people and encourage them to keep you informed of any problems or rumors they hear about. Ask for their advice, and assure them that you value their assistance.

*Excerpted from the Parent Involvement Handbook, produced by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in cooperation with the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association, 1984.*



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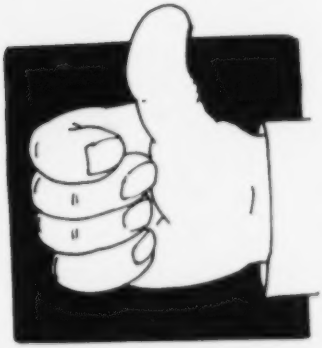

# Revitalizing PTA or parent groups

**Meaningful partnerships with parents require careful planning, action, implementing and evaluation.**

1. Vary times and locations of meetings.
2. Run buses through areas with socio-economic problems.
3. Form car pools.
4. Provide babysitting services.
5. Publish a monthly newsletter.
6. Survey parents to determine needs and concerns.
7. Small groups should be personally invited to lunch at school to kindle interest.
8. Grade-level PTA groups might be formed, possibly even classroom level.
9. Principals should include parents in all advisory committees and involve them in decision making.
10. The central office should support a viable parent organization rather than try to dominate it.
11. Sponsor a "Back-to-School Day" for parents instead of a "Back-to-School Night." Students could come in later for shortened classes.

12. Invitations to meetings and events should be attractive and eyecatching.
13. Dad's breakfasts should be held during the week.
14. PTSAs might be formed, including students in the organization.
15. Notices of meetings and newsletters should be in all pediatricians' and dentists' offices.
16. Grandparents and senior citizens should be informed of meetings.
17. Ask room mothers to promote PTA as part of their assignments.
18. Letters from the parent group should be sent to parents of infants and to new people in the attendance area.
19. Give awards as incentives for attendance.
20. Long prayers, pledges and minutes at meetings might be shortened or eliminated.
21. Be available as a resource pool for volunteers to become involved in school programs.
22. Be an organization devoted to helping parents learn how their children learn.
23. Teach parents about what the school is doing to help children learn.
24. Meetings should be shorter.
25. The entire PTA could be used periodically as an advisory group.
26. The Board of Education or the superintendent may want to assign specific tasks to the local parent group.
27. Include "parents' rights" for PTA groups.
28. Send a delegate to meetings of the Board of Education who should report back to the group.
29. Build an on-going program to establish and maintain relationships between the home-school association and the Board of Education.
30. Distribute "board briefs" to PTA members.
31. Boards of Education may want to subsidize PTAs in some projects.
32. Cut down on fund-raising activities.
33. The public relations office should help parent groups in producing and mailing newsletters.

34. PTA officers should be involved in the planning for elections.
35. The PTA is a source of people for advisory committees.
36. Form a districtwide council of PTAs or parent groups.
37. Leadership training sessions should be offered for PTA officers by the school system.
38. The PTA president might be invited to each faculty meeting.
39. The PTA president or other parent might be invited to principal's council meetings.
40. Undertake a public relations program to explain the purpose of the group for parents.
41. The school district might offer an effective leadership workshop for all PTA members.
42. Parent groups should be considered a prime source of good potential board members.
43. Publish "PTA briefs" to let other units know what ideas are being tried around the district.
44. Teachers should not dominate PTA meetings.
45. Separate normal school activities from PTA programs. For example, the holiday program may be a school-sponsored, rather than a PTA-sponsored activity.
46. In school newsletters, spotlight PTA people and activities.
47. Communicate the new thrust of national PTA to the community.
48. Open the school for community use by students and parents.
49. Make the best possible use of nationally produced PTA material.
50. Elect people to offices in parent groups only if they give the positions high priority.
51. Encourage a national idea exchange for parent groups.
52. Obtain the commitment of school principals to making parent groups work.
53. Elect husbands and wives as co-officers when possible.
54. Survey parents to determine what they feel the PTA should provide.
55. Hold an awards banquet, sponsored by the PTA.
56. Get the group involved in activities of the community, including park development, safety, and so on.
57. Make special parent committees, such as band parents, a part of the PTA or parent organization.

58. Occasionally ask the parent group to do the school a favor, such as contributing a piece of playground equipment or holding an appreciation luncheon for teachers.
59. Communicate vital information to members, such as results of fund drives, and so on.
60. Hold workshops for PTA presidents and school principals. Work through a process to help identify and solve problems.

*Excerpted from a brainstorming session at a workshop of the National School Public Relations Association.*

# Six great ways to greet new students, parents

**Whatever form a newcomers' program takes, it needs the visible support of the principal.**

The first day at a new school can be every bit as stressful for a young child as the first day on a new job is for an adult. Here is a six-point newcomers' program that is used in an Illinois school district to help smooth the way for new students.

**1. Registration.** Encourage parents to come to school in person to register their children and to bring the children with them. After the paperwork is completed, the principal takes the students and parents on a brief tour of the school, introducing them to the child's new teacher. If school isn't in session, the principal encourages the teacher to telephone the family before school starts.

**2. First day of school.** An open house kicks off the school year. Parents accompany their children to class, where they meet the teacher and help their children settle into their assigned desks.

All staff members and representatives of the PTO are on hand to greet newcomers, make introductions, welcome them to school and answer questions. Information is distributed including the back-to-school issue of the newsletter, which briefly describes the newcomers' program. The purpose of the open house is to put everyone, including long-time residents of the community, at ease, but it especially makes the new families feel at home.

**3. Parent survey.** A questionnaire given out at open house gives parents a chance to voice their concerns and expectations. "What do you hope your child will accomplish academically this year?", "How can we help your child reach those goals?" and "Are there specific areas of the arts your child excels in?" are among the questions asked. The results are expecially useful in familiarizing teachers with new students and their parents. If any problems or concerns are listed, the parents are contacted immediately to see what can be done. The surveys are placed in students' files and returned to the family if the child leaves school.

**4. Parties for new students.** During the second week of school, parties are held for the new students at each grade level. These gatherings help the students get to know each other, as well as acquainting the teachers and other school personnel with the students. When the kids see who else is new, they often begin to form friendships among themselves. The parties begin with introductions and refreshments, then each child tells the others a little about himself — where he lived before, what his interests and hobbies are, and so on. The information is jotted down so the children can take it back to their classrooms where the teacher can use it to pair new students with others who have similar interests. Children also are asked about their impressions of the school, its programs and the community. Questions and comments are encouraged, but it's important to keep the mood of the party light and informal.

**5. New parents' night.** Shortly after these parties, parents of new students are sent personal invitations to an evening meeting where they tour the building, review school rules, policies and procedures. Special services and programs are outlined, community resources are described and suggestions are given on how to ease their child's adjustment to the new school. The meeting then is opened to general discussion and questions. Parents are invited to

make special appointments to get better acquainted or to talk about special concerns.

**6. Back-to-school night.** A back-to-school night is held during the third or fourth week of school, when all parents and children visit the classrooms and hear presentations about the curriculum.

Within the first month of school, new parents have had at least four opportunities to meet their child's teacher and other school personnel. And each new student has had a friendly introduction to school.

If your community wants to set up a similar program, consider these questions: Are enough new students enrolled each year to warrant such a program? If so, which school personnel should be involved in the program? And what specific procedures would best fit our school and community needs? Whatever shape the program takes, it needs the visible support of the principal.

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# 50 ways to increase home-school cooperation

**The public's two most prized possessions are their kids and their money. This communication undertaking reaps big rewards.**

1. Create a "How Parents Can Help" handbook which gives practical suggestions for home activities such as making out grocery lists, nature walks, etc.

2. Invite a few parents to a coffee hour with the principal. Hold it at the home of the PTA leader.

3. Vary the times for open houses. Hold some in the afternoon, some at night.

4. Invite several parents to sample the school lunch once a month. Seat them with the principal, a teacher and several randomly selected students.

5. Hold a "Senior Citizen Day" at the school, inviting grandparents and other older friends of the school. Provide transportation.

6. Invite new teachers and new parents to a tour of the dis-

trict. Cover points of interest, local churches, facilities available in the area, places that could be used for field trips, boundaries of attendance area.

7. Arrange athletic and academic contests between parents and students and teachers.

8. Provide an opportunity for parents to get together with other parents for discussions about school problems.

9. Send home "happy-grams" — good news notes about accomplishments and achievements.

10. Use parents as field trip helpers and observers.

11. Make progress charts — one at school for the teacher and one at home for the child and parent.

12. Set goals for each child and send home notes that parents must sign and return.

13. Have children prepare a luncheon for parents, teachers and themselves. Send handwritten invitations.

14. Start "Saturday Clubs" to provide enrichment programs, film showing, family recreational activities, etc. at the school.

15. Set up projects where children bring things from home.

16. Make it possible for teachers to make home visits, at least occasionally.

17. Set up parent conference days during the school year for parents to come to school to discuss progress with their child's teacher.

18. Have students interview their parents about how life has improved since their childhood.

19. Recruit parents to spend an hour or two each week helping in their child's classroom.

20. Establish a classroom speakers' bureau with parents or relatives of children sharing their experiences, hobbies, job information, etc.

21. Have students conduct a survey of parents to evaluate the school and collect ideas for improvement. Distribute the survey results to all parents.

22. Use parent volunteers as tutors for students having difficulty.

23. Ask parents to assist in special clinics, the library or counseling area.

24. Set up high school parent advisory councils to assist in curricular and instructional changes and to aid in establishing goals and objectives in each department.

25. Establish a homework hotline for parents to check on nightly assignments.

26. Hold high school department seminars for parents to help them help their children gain the most out of particular course offerings.

27. Establish regular visitation days for observation of classes and a chance for parents to offer constructive suggestions.

28. In each month's newsletter, publish the names and phone numbers of a few parents who are willing to talk to other parents about any kind of interest or concern.

29. Advise parents of the teacher's conference periods or other best times to reach the teacher.

30. Assign homework that requires parental input and participation.

31. Encourage teachers to become more visible in the community.

32. Advertise one evening a week when parents or students can telephone the principal to ask questions or discuss problems.

33. Help parents who are nonreaders to prepare their children to learn to read.

34. Encourage parents to praise their child's successes.

35. Occasionally ask the child to have parents call the teachers rather than have the teacher contact the parents.

36. Set up an idea exchange in the school newsletter. Ask parents to send in ideas. Then, in a later issue of the paper, publish the ideas and how they were used.

37. Take note of the fact that more fathers are participating in PTA. Be sure to include fathers in all school communication.

38. Involve parents in discussions about junior high school while their children are still in elementary school. Do the same for junior high parents before their children reach senior high.

39. Set up a plan for principals to make "house calls."

40. Establish a Home-School Cooperation Committee. Exchange reports with other schools.

41. Urge teacher training institutions to place more importance on home-school cooperation in their teacher education programs.

42. Conduct surveys and provide parents with research on such things as average hours of sleep per night by grade, average hours devoted to homework, television viewing, etc.

## Ideas for American Education Week

Here are some programs and activities that succeeded for the Vigo County School Corporation, Terre Haute (IN), contributed by Charles M. Clark, administrative assistant.

1. The "Good Neighbor" Breakfast — Managers and owners of business establishments near the school were invited for breakfast in the school cafeteria and were encouraged to tour the building and visit classes and exhibits.

2. Senior Citizen Day — Retired school patrons were invited for lunch and special musical programs were arranged for their entertainment.

3. Several of our elementary schools invited parents to visit classes during this week and to share with students a hobby or skill which they feel would be of interest to students.

4. Meet the Press Luncheon — Media representatives were invited to meet with student government officers and faculty members in an informal luncheon at a different school each day of the week.

5. Open House Activities — Maximum involvement of students is stressed and the activities ranged from Spanish, German, French, and Latin classes serving native foods to journalism classes producing the school newspaper.

6. During American Education Week, service clubs such as Rotary and Kiwanis were encouraged to schedule their regular luncheon meetings at various schools. This provided an opportunity for members to visit the schools and also provided students and faculty with the opportunity to explain school programs to these citizens.

43. Have parents contact colleges with suggestions for potential teachers.

44. Link up parents of expelled or suspended students with parents who have successfully dealt with similar problems.

45. Invite parents of a child having difficulties to meet with staff to explore ways to help and to use preventive techniques.

46. Seek out the parents who never participate. Sometimes this parent feels inadequate or timid and simply need to be encouraged and needed.

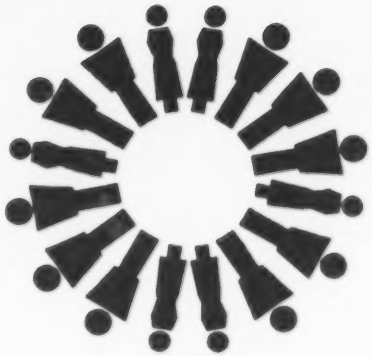
47. Hold staff workshops on communications skills with a special focus on parents.

48. Be sure that teachers are represented and recognized at PTA or other parent group meetings.

49. Make an effort to improve the telephone answering techniques of everyone in the school office.

50. Use this list of 50 ideas as a discussion guide to develop 50 more ideas for increasing home-school cooperation.

*Excerpted from the Parent Involvement Handbook, produced by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in cooperation with the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association, 1984.*



# Helpful guidelines for advisory committees

**Here's a way to involve students, school staff or citizens to provide input which will lead to more informed board decisions.**

The principal will frequently want to form advisory committees to study or make recommendations on various projects or issues before the school or community. Such committees can be made up of students, school staff or citizens at large.

Some basic guidelines ensure smoother committee operation and success. First, recognize that advisory committees are just that — advisory. They are a means of involving other people. It is hoped that their input will lead to more informed decisions and judgments. Advisory committees are not designed to "run" the schools. That responsibility must necessarily rest with the school board who is lawfully and practically charged with such a role.

Teachers and other employees should be included in the makeup of certain advisory groups — not necessarily as representatives of employee organizations, but because their background will be helpful to the mission of the committee.

Here are tips regarding positive aspects of committees, cautions and questions to ask before starting an advisory committee.

## Positive and negative aspects

- With proper advance planning, citizens' committees can be of immeasurable value to a school and the community in general.
- Establishment of a committee can force or crystalize the recognition of a problem facing the school.
- Citizens can be involved in a profitable manner.
- Citizens will gain information about the school and education in general through committee study.
- New lines of thought will occur as committee members (and school personnel) dig into the study area.
- Ideas and suggestions will be provided to the board of directors.
- Committee members will carry ideas and attitudes to other people in the community.

## Cautions

- If a committee is not needed for a particular problem, necessary action may be delayed by the formation of a committee.
- If the committee oversteps its charge or assignment, the problem is not studied properly and the value of the final report is of little value.
- If the committee membership is not representative of the community to the degree necessary, recommendations will arise out of an unrepresentative pressure group and taint the final report.
- If the committee is appointed at the wrong time of the year or with too long or too much time for the study period, the interest of committee members wanes.
- If the ground rules for communication (between the commit-

tee and board, news media and general public) are not drawn properly at the outset, confusion sets in as to what is to be said to whom.

- If the committee conducts little substantial research, the final report is a collection of generalizations and opinions of little value to anyone.

### Questions you should ask

There are a number of questions that should be asked by principals before final arrangements are made for an advisory committee. Experience with successful committees suggests that the answers to these questions are needed before organizing:

- What is the problem? Is it defined well enough for a committee to dig into it?
- Is it the kind of problem a citizens' committee can deal with or are there better ways of resolving the situation?
- What is the charge to be given to the committee? What is it expected to do? Are there limitations imposed on the committee?
- Who should be on the committee? How are members to be selected? What qualifications should they have? Will membership be representative of the community?
- How large should the committee be? Will there be enough to conduct business and yet not too many?
- How long does the committee have in which to conduct the study? Is it sufficient to do a good job?
- Is the committee charged with making a report? To whom? Will the report be made public? If not, why not?
- If it is a continuing council or committee, how will the membership be rotated?
- What resources are available to assist the committee in its study?
- What funds will be needed to conduct committee business — for example, printing, paper, postage, travel — and who is to provide these funds?

- Who will provide the leadership for the committee? How will this person or these persons be selected? Do committee members know this before accepting membership on the committee?
- How will decisions be made in the committee? Should this be left up to members or is there a preferred method?
- When the committee has completed its work, what sort of acknowledgment is planned — a dinner, a letter, a certificate?
- Who is going to provide an evaluation of the committee? Information should be gathered indicating why the committee succeeded or failed in certain areas so that changes in structure and operation can be made for future committees.

## Basic guidelines

- State clearly and precisely the goals of the advisory committee.
- Involve a representative cross section of the community and the school family.
- Keep advisory committee membership at a manageable level.
- Establish a time schedule and specific goals.
- Determine precisely how the committee will work with the news media.
- Don't have too many advisory committees in operation at one time.
- Staff the advisory committee properly in terms of administration and other support personnel.
- Establish a clear understanding as to what will happen with the committee's report and deliberations.
- Keep the committee on its course.
- Discharge and thank the committee in a meaningful and appropriate manner.

## 10 commandments for effective building-level committees

**1. Press for a broadly representative committee:** Its impact and credibility will be increased, whether it is advisory or decision-making. This means, in plain language, representative by ethnic groups by sex and by socio-economic status.

**2. Environment:** Provide for comfort (preferably chairs around tables — we all need something to lean on) and eye contact (chairs arranged in a circle, a square or U-shaped). Have coffee available — it's just common hospitality. If your charge, you will generally get better results with a polite sign that suggests "Thank you for your donation" than with a flat fee.

**3. Identification:** Use nametags with both the person and the organization he or she represents identified on the tag in big, clear letters — starting with the first meeting. Have round-the-room introductions and take attendance; you may need to know who was there when a motion was passed or decision made.

**4. Provide each member** of the group with a packet of carefully selected information (too much, and nobody will ever read it; too little, and you may leave too many questions unanswered). It should include:

- A membership list of the entire group, as soon as the membership is established, with addresses and phone numbers, so members can communicate readily with each other.
- Briefly stated, the purpose of the committee, if it is new or a brief-duration ad hoc committee; or a brief history of the group, if it is an established and continuing committee; bylaws, if there are any in effect.
- Other pertinent data, such as maps, briefly and clearly stated relevant statistics, or lists. You can't expect people to operate in a vacuum; on the other hand, don't deluge them with more material than the minimum essentials — especially, until they ask for it.

**5. Encourage members to "look after one another"**, through

car pools; and calling one another when a member has been absent after the first meeting.

**6. Set parameters clearly and honestly,** and don't delude people with a false expectation of authority they may not have. If the committee is advisory, make it clear for whom the advice is intended; and make sure that recommendations are communicated.

**7. Support it!** If the committee is worth having at all, it is worth a little clerical support. Send out brief minutes of the meetings to all members, and a combination agenda-reminder notice in advance of the next meeting.

**8. Encourage internal leadership,** and the suggesting of future agenda items by committee members. Form a small steering committee elected by the group to plan meetings, but provide back-up support.

**9. Set starting and ending times, and stick to them!** Any meeting lasting more than two hours is of questionable value; many can be shorter. People are busy, have their own lives to live, and need to know in advance the time commitment they are making.

**10. Keep your sense of humor!** The most serious discussion has its lighter side, and a touch of humor adds perspective. Remember, the "human comedy" is just that!

*Contributed by* ***Nick Goble,*** *assistant executive director of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, and* ***Albert E. Holliday,*** *director of the Educational Communication Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations.***

# Key communicators: An authorized grapevine

**This concept operates to get the real story out to citizens quickly and with validity.**

School administrators too frequently equate public relations and communications with one-way efforts such as newspaper publicity and newsletters. But those newspapers and newsletters wouldn't do school authorities much good when something goes wrong. In a crisis, traditional communication channels don't operate fast enough or involve the audiences with the greatest need to know.

The answer is a low-cost, two-way people network — one that will enable principals to communicate quickly with the community and the school family, and deal with sparks instead of fires.

The key communicators concept provides the basis for that network in many schools throughout the country. It works in small schools and large. It's effective in rural regions and in urban areas. It's really an "authorized grapevine" that operates to get the real story out to citizens quickly and with credibility.

Key communicators are those adults and students who talk to and are believed by a large number of people. In a crisis, KCs pass

along correct information to these people and help squelch rumors and combat misinformation.

KCs don't necessarily show up on an organizational chart of major community organizations. Nor are they always a part of what is considered the formal power structure of the school or community. But they do come in contact with lots of people. A key communicator might be:

- A barber, hair stylist or bartender who has a daily captive audience.
- The owner of a hoagie shop popular with students.
- A dentist or doctor.
- A retired junior high school custodian who likes to "chat" about members of the school family.
- A school secretary who is involved in two bowling leagues, three community charitable groups and who is related by marriage to 32 families in the district.
- A student who is highly respected by peers.

While these people exercise a great deal of influence on others, you'll have to dig a bit to identify them. These steps in forming and working with a cadre of key communicators have worked well in other schools.

1. The process starts with a fairly small number of school people who can serve as KC identifiers. Bring them together briefly to explain the KC concept. Describe a sociogram (often used in classrooms to identify popular, unpopular, etc. students) and how that principle is being applied here. As fully as possible, the school identifiers should comprise a representative membership of the community's churches, clubs, civic associations, even coffee or beer drinking crowds and other social gatherings where people talk. This is to assure that all socio-economic levels are represented.

2. Over a period of several weeks, the identifiers hitchhike onto social occasions to verbally survey residents. Use casual questions such as, "Say, we're doing a survey on how well we're getting the school story across. Could you tell me the names of a few people you have talked with recently about school taxes or the principal or

teachers?" (Be certain to assure the person that you don't want to know **what** they talked about — just **who** they talked with.) These casual encounters will provide up to several hundred names which should be relayed to the KC organizer. Tabulation will show that a number of people will appear most often. These are your community's key communicators, the ones this whole program will be built upon.

**3.** Analyze each KC in terms of overall impact or effect at specific schools or areas. That is, one KC may come in contact with just residents around one elementary school. Another is **the** person in a black or Spanish-speaking community. This analysis of each will be helpful in knowing who to call on according to the situation.

**4.** The principal should go to the KCs and enlist their aid. Experience has shown that 95% of those asked will be pleased to cooperate. You are not asking them to attend lots of meetings or to act as a formal advisory committee. Thus, demands on their time — and most KCs will be very busy people already — are minimal.

Send a letter or call each person explaining the concept and how the KC can be of service. Arrange to have a brief meeting with all in the near future. If you use a letter, follow it up with a phone call. Letters alone will attract only about half of those invited to meetings, but a call by a principal will usually guarantee a large turnout.

Meeting agendas and tone should be informal. Explain how the KC concept would operate in a few typical cases. Above all, keep the meeting short — no more than an hour. Or, meet with people individually or in small groups over coffee in the corner diner.

**5.** Emphasize, in meetings or personal talks, that the KC concept is based on a two-way exchange. You want to hear about rumblings or rumors running through the community. If facts are in error, you can call the KCs with the real data and they in turn can pass along the correct information. If hostile action is planned, you can alert school authorities so they can make counter plans.

But you must share information with the KCs on a regular basis. Send them background reports — on teacher turnover, on new construction, on possible school closings. Do whatever you can to make the KCs an informed group of people and they in turn will spread the word about the school and what it is trying to do.

Some principals never bring the key communicators together as a group. Many invite them to react — by letter or at a meeting. Other administrators choose to telephone key communicators to get community thinking on school topics. Key communicator groups can be approached before major decisions that will prompt community reactions are made. For example, changing school attendance boundaries or closing schools might be the kinds of topics that key communicators can provide input on.

The instant KC process allows people to know they have an important role in the schools. And it usually causes them to give the school officials the benefit of the doubt if a problem arises — especially if those officials have been honest all the time.

In a day of more and more public clamor about what's being done with people's two most prized possessions — their kids and their money — this communications undertaking will reap big dividends.

And all it costs is a bit of time to get it going — small price to pay for a smoother running school.

Only you can know what works best for your community. The KC idea is one that works. It costs nothing and it should prevent fires. Sparks are a heck of a lot easier to handle.

*Contributed by* ***Dr. Donald Bagin,*** *professor of communication and director of the graduate program in educational communication at Glassboro State College (NJ).*

# Seven steps to reach your nonparent publics

**Plans of action and specific examples to help "sell" your district to those who need to hear about it the most.**

The often quoted statistic that about 75% of our population no longer has a direct relationship with our schools can be frightening to those concerned with school-community relations. However, the best way to deal with fear is by facing it, and the best way to face your nonparent publics is with a plan of action to present the positive news about your schools. Without a plan your school's image may never appear clearly to the public — or worse yet, may be totally distorted.

The need to market our schools to those who do not have children in school has become a dire need in areas where referenda and budgets are being defeated on a regular basis. Whether your school has experienced that dilemma or not, the following plans of action and the specific examples will help "sell" your school to those who need to hear about it the most.

**1. Build your public relations campaign around a theme, a logo or a motto.** Involve your staff (certified and noncertified) in the process, perhaps even offering a prize for the best educational theme. Some examples of themes are: Pride in Our Product; Useful, Involved Citizens; Where Tradition + Progress = Educational Excellence. (In the latter slogan, the important goals of the community were incorporated into the goals of the school district.)

**2. Hold an inservice session,** preferably before school starts. Include **every** employee in the school and the members of the school board. Don't let them sit where they usually do, but purposely mix the seating arrangement so they are forced to talk with people outside of their usual sphere. Let them all know how important each of their jobs are in the delivery of educational services to the students. Start a pride-building process. Make the entire staff a part of the "What's good about our school" idea. Brainstorming, small group sessions, and the like can have very positive effects.

**3. Invite the staff to participate in the decision on the new theme or motto.** If you've got one already, ask them how it can be emphasized more. Let other school-related groups such as PTO, athletic boosters, etc., know what you are doing, and ask them to help.

**4.** Once you have mobilized your forces to begin the process of selling your product — the excellent education in your school — then, along with your staff, **identify the nonparent publics in your community.** What are the significant populations? Who do you need to reach — senior citizens, pre-school parents, the members of the business community, farmers, university placement personnel?

**5.** Next, **decide what messages you want to deliver to these publics.** Is it the same message for all? Different groups may need different messages.

**6.** Now, **determine how these messages will be communicated.** The medium can be as important as the message. Some of the different delivery systems include newsletters, brochures, special invitations to events, announcements to churches, personal messages, handouts for real estate agents, placemats for eating establishments and surveys with printed results.

**7.** Even more important, **you should make, and extract, a com-**

**mitment to pride in your school.** We all have things to be proud of, and we need to market these to our publics. We also need, of course, to be willing to improve those areas that are not so perfect, and to be willing to admit that we make mistakes. Nothing destroys the rapport we have cultivated more than not facing the reality of our trouble spots. These can be turned to our advantage when we point to how we have improved them later on.

The following are examples of how to reach some of those nonparent publics who are waiting to hear from you.

| Specific marketing techniques | Intended audience |
|---|---|
| Learning at home workshop | Pre-school parents |
| Complimentary passes to school events | Senior citizens |
| Placemats with art and copy about schools | Patrons of restaurants, cafes |
| Recruitment brochure | Universities and colleges |
| Newsletter | Parents, businesses, churches, nursing homes |
| Citizen visitation program | Direct invitation to parents, grandparents, police, politicians, mayor and citizens to visit specific classes in the schools. |
| Education Sunday | A kickoff to American Education Week with special services in all churches, a community event. |
| Schools as community centers | Host scouts, dance classes, tumbling, adult fitness and community/civic meetings in the school buildings. |
| Motto displays | Place on all office communications (stationery, etc.) to parents, vendors, businesses, universities, and display around the schools. |

| Specific marketing techniques | Intended audience |
|---|---|
| Minicourses taught by volunteers | Community people with talents to interact with students at the high school. |
| Goal-setting | Community — through newspapers, placemats and advertising — is asked to help set school goals. |
| Classroom volunteers | Grandparents, senior citizens and others to help in classrooms, kindergarten, and to serve as resourse people. |
| Regular media coverage of events and activities | General public receives reinforcement on a regular basis that the schools are doing their job. Establish a working relationship with a television station. |

The results of involving your staff in a concerted effort to keep your schools' image before the various publics will have many unintended, but welcome, consequences. The staff will feel more appreciated; they may suggest many ideas which you may never think of; they will feel more ownership in the school, and therefore be better employees; and they will be more cognizant of the publics that they serve.

Your nonparent publics will see a school that feels positive about itself, and projects an image of confidence in its activities. And just as the school's climate determines how well the students learn, the principal's professional climate can determine how well your publics perceive your school's programs. Remember, it's people who sell a school's image, not statistics.

As a final note, the commitment that you make to improve your schools' image is, in the end, the final determiner of how successful your campaign will be. To quote Gary Marx of the American Association of School Administrators, "Be positive. Love your schools. Love your staff. Love your community. Love the kids. Love your job. And . . . show it! The most contagious thing in the world is your attitude."

*Reprinted from an article by* ***Charles Zbrozek****, superintendent of Princeton Elementary School, Princeton, IL, published in the* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations****, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1984.*

## Ideas to involve senior citizens

Senior citizens can bring knowledge, warmth and encouragement into schools. Here are ways schools can build a pro-education spirit and outlook in senior citizens.

1. Reduced-price lunches in school cafeteria once a week, for senior citizens.
2. Special event luncheons at the school, cooked and served by pupils, for them.
3. Special concert for senior folk during Music-in-Our-Schools Week.
4. Designation of an annual Senior Citizen Day.
5. Availability of meeting rooms in schools for senior citizen groups.
6. Students hold a "jog-a-thon" to raise money for the senior citizen center.
7. Employment: Hire the retiree as a part-time aide.
8. Grandparents Day: Grandpa and grandma visit their grandchild's classes and have lunch.
9. Foster grandparents program: Retired people are paid to work on a one-to-one basis with selected pupils who need the help of a mature person.
10. Guest lecturer project: Senior citizens tell classes or assemblies about vocations, hobbies, travels, health, life in other lands, etc.
11. Guest performances and demonstrations: Older residents visit the school and share their talents in music, weaving, toy making, cooking, language.
12. Service on a citizen advisory committee.
13. Hold a senior citizen craft fair at the school.

Chapter 4

# USING PUBLICATIONS TO SHARE YOUR STORY

# School publications in your PR program

**Publications should be designed to help your consumers get answers to several basic questions.**

Effective school publications are an essential component of any school public relations program. Publications provide tangible evidence of a school's commitment to communicate with various publics. A careful analysis of school publications will provide insight and understanding beyond the basic facts and obvious information.

School publications can be divided into categories according to the public and use for which the publication was created.

- **For internal publics — co-workers, students, parents** — staff newsletter, staff handbook, program of studies, discipline code, student information guide, student newsletter, building newsletter, parent information guide, parent handbook.
- **For "focus" or target groups** — brochures, pamphlets, information packets, newsletters.

Nearly all school public relations practitioners agree that the internal publics should receive the highest priority. Those who are employed in the schools — and the students who attend the schools — should have the latest and best information appropritate to their respective needs.

Survey results indicate that people get most of their information from people who work in schools and from students. Opinions about the quality of schools and the effectiveness of school programs are based on reports from the representataives of our internal publics.

Let's consider the variety of topics which should be included in a **co-worker newsletter.** Many editors of such newsletters lead off with a glowing upbeat "celebration" story. The best lead story announces a success — an accomplishment — a "good news" item.

Co-worker newsletters regularly include items such as co-worker conference reports, vacancy announcements, schedule changes, board policy review, administrative regulations, introduction of new co-workers, new board members' views.

These newsletters should be published on a regular basis while news is fresh and topical. The format should be simple and straightforward. Many districts print a single sheet 8½" x 11" in house and distribute the same day. Since old news is not news, every effort should be made to publish information before it is generally known. The co-worker newsletter as an historic record has relatively little value.

**Staff handbooks** should be carefully edited to assure direct, understandable language. Format decisions should be made in consideration of frequency of use, "storage" of publication and length of life. In other words: How will it be used? Where will it be kept? How long must it last?

Since most staff handbooks are revised, annual decisions should be made about: storage of copy in word processor, compositor, or memory typewriter; self-cover printed on regular offset "house" paper in common 8½" x 11" format. Also, when will next revision take place? Will copy remain true until next schedule revision? Will photos or clip art add to usefulness of handbook? Are necessary drawings and illustrations clear and properly labeled?

**School board policy manuals and administrative regulations** should be available in administrative offices and professional li-

braries. These important reference books will help co-workers to interpret and understand the foundations of decisions and the direction of the school district. Since these books will be updated continuously, a simple three-ring binder format is most common. Many school districts have special preprinted banner heads to identify board policy and administrative regulations at first glance. Care must be taken to keep these similar documents distinct to avoid confusion about which is policy and which is not.

An understanding of the difference between official board policy, administrative regulations, school guidelines, building procedures and common practice must be developed at all levels. School communications often refer to "policy" when no policy exists — it is simply "tradition" or common practice.

**Use conversational style writing**

Try to write the way you talk, say the experts. It's good advice for anyone in business. The best language is the language of or-

## Newsletter tips

Newsletters should be:

- Attractive, appropriate and brief.
- Easy to read, requiring little time or effort.
- Published regularly, frequently, on schedule.
- Fresh, timely, informative and entertaining.
- Important, and convey the spirit and tone of the agency or organization.

Newsletters should **not** be:

- Produced to meet deadlines.
- Expected to compliment and flatter the management.
- Apologetic for organizational errors.
- Published to please "the boss."
- Filled with amateur art.
- Filled with gossip.
- Produced in a crowded format with small photos and small type.



96

## Publications should make a bold statement

Whether you are producing a pamphlet, handbook or newsletter, it should snap, crackle and pop with high quality photos, crisp copy and attractive graphics.

To attract more support, adopt a fresh look and maintain a professional appearance. Many publications need a new logo, new image and new identity. Your publications compete for the time and attention of busy people.

Developing publications requires planning, writing, photography, designing, editing, printing and distribution.

dinary conversation. And this holds true whether we write an occasional memo or lengthy reports.

We speak conversational language; we think in conversational language. It's the easiest form of expression for anyone to understand. So why not use it in written communication as well? Those who use a more formal style make things harder for their readers. Messages have to be translated before people can get at the real meaning. In the process, they automatically lose clarity and impact.

Get your thoughts straight, then write them or dictate them exactly as you would if you were talking to one person across the desk. Don't worry about grammar; you can straighten that out later.

If you remember you're talking to one person, you'll be surprised how the tangled sentences, the complicated language, the high-blown phrases will seem out of place. You'll eliminate them. And your writing will improve.

School publications should make a bold statement. Whether they be pamphlets, newsletters or handbooks they should snap, crackle, and pop with high quality photos, crisp copy and attractive graphics.

Many school publications need a new logo, new image and new identity. Whenever you want to attract more support, you need to adopt a fresh look and a professional approach to your publications.

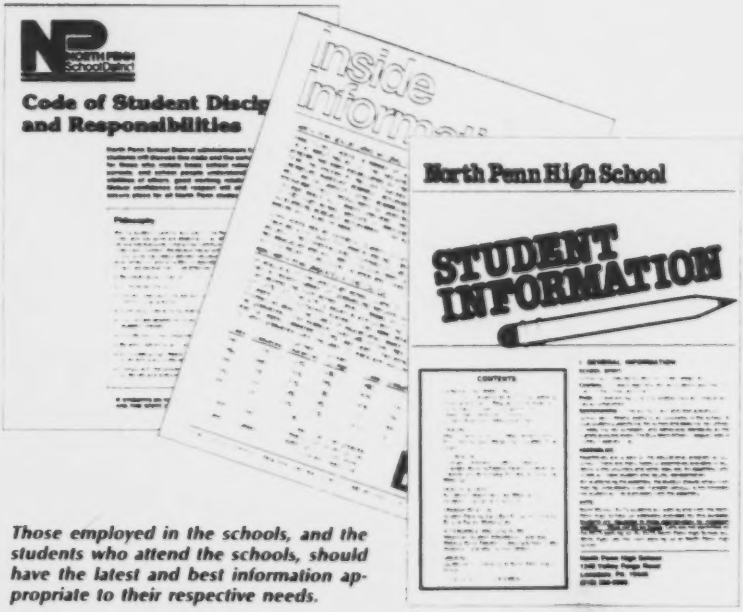
School publications compete for the time and attention of

busy people. These busy people watch the world in color on the morning news, evening news, and in-between news. They receive handsome magazines, colorful bulk-mail advertising designed to open checkbooks, and advertising from local stores skillfully designed to activate charge cards. Your publications must compete with suggestive and sometimes erotic advertising. Your "competition" spends millions for top talent while we supervise a no-frills-allowed budget.

### Consider 'voice' and 'tone'

Publications suffer most when we allow them to be written by the program leaders who will teach the classes and sponsor the activities. The "suffering" continues whenever a secretary is assigned to update the copy from last term or last year without the help of a **writer.**

Each publication needs a writer to establish the style and tone. This writer should review the notes and outlines that were submitted.




***Those employed in the schools, and the students who attend the schools, should have the latest and best information appropriate to their respective needs.***

Whether controlled by a writer or principal, the important thing to avoid is repetitious and uninteresting copy. Develop a fresh approach, using colorful language. Use a strong voice and lots of action verbs. Writers must know how to make a sale.

Copy should be active rather than passive. The tone should be "we" not "I," reflecting that we are the community leaders who make things happen in our schools. "We" implies that we are the people who care about the quality of life in our community.

All the rules for good writing should be observed. Short sentences are preferred. People expect the facts to be presented in a sequential and logical manner.

**Photographs are a must**

Obtaining a good photographer is a top priority. Photographs are needed to tell the story. To attempt the job without photographs is to limit the chances for success.

There is no need to describe with words what is better communicated with a photo. Photos should be large, tightly cropped and selected for their ability to communicate a feeling, mood or idea. When the photo depicts everyone having a good time, the statement has been made. When the photo shows older people and younger people helping each other to learn a new skill, that is powerful program publicity.

Photos should be unposed, informal, natural and demonstrate the programs at work. Refuse to use the photos of leaders presenting plaques and certificates, or the new officers' lineup, or the overworked handshake. People expect photos to help communicate the scope and depth of the program. Photos will get results for the editor who knows how to use them.

If a staff photographer is out of the question, a free-lance photographer is not. The local newspaper photographer will often be happy to "moonlight" for some extra pay. Most communities produce at least one promising high school student photographer each year. These enterprising students will usually work all night to meet a deadline if they get some recognition along with beginner's pay.

After the photos have been taken, quality processing is a must. If the photos were taken by an amateur with a good eye for composition, invest in quality processing and printing at a reputable

custom photo lab. A reproduction quality print is essential. Publications will not be improved by photographs of mediocre quality.

Photograph people doing the things they do. Move in to get close to the action. Afer that, crop any distracting or unnecessary parts of the photo. Encourage the photographer to use lots of film. Even though film is more expensive than ever, it is still inexpensive when we consider the potential results from "award-winning photographs."

**When should format be changed?**

A new format is needed if the publication is crowded, awk-

## The building-level newsletter

A friendly newsletter from a neighborhood school should be the top priority in any school district publications effort. There is no substitute for the newsletter that is written for parents, students and neighbors of a particular school. The neighborhood elementary school staff has an excellent opportunity to develop good school-community relations by spending time, energy and small amounts of money on a regularly published newsletter.

In order to be timely and effective, the building-level newsletter should be published at least six times during the school year. Such a schedule would probably require copies dated August, October, December, February, April and June. We suggest August because there are always those back-to-school information items which should be sent to parents before school opens. We believe the August-September issue should be a preview for the year and the June issue should summarize the events of the year. We should tell our readers what will happen, what is happening and what has happened.

A building-level newsletter can be a friendly and interesting publication. With a focus on people and lots of short, "newsy" items and plenty of human interest features, the newsletter can help people to understand their neighborhood school and the people who make it work. A newsletter can be published with a degree of "affection."

ward, too expensive or in need of a new look. The first of these reasons may be the most obvious to everyone.

A crowded publication has no room for large photographs. The copy has been set in too small a typeface and is therefore very difficult to read. The effective use of large headlines is impossible. White space is nonexistent. There is no room for another piece of copy. There is no room for growth, flexibility or creativity. There is only so much space on a single sheet, no matter how it is folded.

Most authorities agree that type selected for regular copy should be either 10 or 12 point. To use a smaller type is to ask for trouble.

Examples of "awkward" publications are less easy to describe. It is awkward when the paper has been folded and the copy arranged so that there is no logic or sequence to the piece. When the publication must be turned several times — and items are separated from similar items because of space limitations — then a new format is required.

A publication is too expensive whenever another format would cost less and be as effective. If a new format would be both less expensive and more effective, then a new format is required.

There comes a time when a newsletter should become a tabloid. There may be times when a tabloid should become a booklet. Any decision to design a new look should be discussed with those who will be responsible for the change. Ideally the photographer, artist, copywriter, secretary, editor and printer should review options and exchange ideas. Since some editors work alone and have almost no staff for sharing ideas, an advisory committee should be considered. Local residents almost always will agree to assist without pay on a short-term basis. A local newspaper photographer, an advertising agency employee, an artist, a former journalist, or a freelance writer can be found in most communities.

The need for a new look must be clearly understood by all those who will design the new look. In other words, what was wrong with what you had must be discussed before you can agree on what you need. It might be good to list complaints about the standard format along with a list of expectations for the new format. The need for greater flexibility, more space and a more contemporary appearance will usually head the list of expectations.

Examples of good and not-so-good publications should be col-

lected and kept up to date. It always helps to make the point with examples of good, bad and mediocre publications to show the boss. (I've never known someone to select the mediocre or bad publications as the model.) Those who produce school publications should write to colleagues throughout the country asking to be put on mailing lists for a publications exchange network.

### Quality control is vital

Responsibility for the finished publication should never be forfeited. The buyer of services should not assign responsibility for a quality printing job to the printer. The buyer must establish checkpoints and exercise the right to see proof pages and a final proof copy.

Those who create the publication must ultimately assume responsibility for any and all errors made by the printer. Errors must be caught before the presses run. School officials must proofread, in addition to that done by the typesetters. Insist on "blue-line" proofs and a final look at the total job. No amount of last minute checking can be considered too much. The goal must be perfect copy.

Printers should be asked to give several suggestions regarding the most appropriate paper stock.

It is common for the printer to honor customer requests with the attitude that the customer is always right. Only when directly asked will the printer suggest a method other than the one originally requested. In other words, the printer will give you what you want. It's your responsibility to know what you want, or to ask for advice. Many printing jobs are produced on the wrong paper because customers "knew" exactly what they wanted.

Copy should be sent to the printer in perfect condition. Anything less will result in higher printing costs. Don't pay a printer to figure out what was intended. Learn how to work with printers to keep costs down, and quality up.

### Publish to communicate

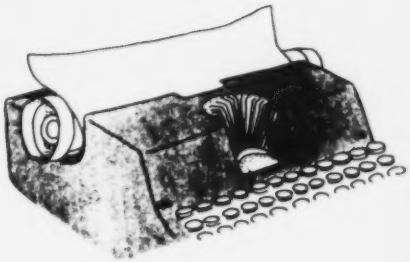
It should be stressed that school officials publish because there is an obvious need to share information with large numbers of people. School people should not publish because of tradition or a

sense of obligation. When the need is understood, when the consumer's viewpoint is valued and when the publication is written to meet the consumer's need — good publications result.

Good textbooks are available on graphics and publications. Good workshops and seminars are held in many cities. Good speakers are available on the topic. But the success of each school publication begins with the publisher's own commitment and sensitivity.

Publish to communicate. In order for the process to be complete, there must be a receiver for the message. The receiver determines whether or not the process is complete. Be bold and make a clear statement if you expect significant numbers of people to get your message.

*Contributed by* ***Kenneth L. Weir,*** *director of school-community relations, North Penn School District, Lansdale, PA.*



# Four basic school publications

**Regardless of the size of the school, these publications are a must!**

Written communications are just one element in a school district's school-community relations program. However, there are four basic publications that every school needs, regardless of size or public enrollments.

### Staff newsletters

The staff newsletter can be a morale builder and a medium of exchange of information useful to all employees of the school. It can be made to sparkle with facts, news, ideas and items of inspiration for teachers and for custodial workers, for principals and for secretaries.

Staff members in a school usually want facts about developments that will affect them, information they can use in their work, and news about their colleagues. What can you do to ensure that your staff publications are newsworthy, audience-oriented communications?

The answer is to remember that the staff publication is for **people.** It should report about teachers with new ways to teach, custodial workers who have found ways to cut costs, or school office personnel who know how to go out of their way to help parents, students and teachers.

A staff publication also should give space to new board policies, rules and regulations; programs about curriculum, construction, inservice education, selection of instructional materials, or reduction of vandalism.

And now and then, let the staff publication explore an idea, perhaps: Why is there apathy toward schools among certain groups of people?

## 10 points that work for quality

1. Attempt to make the staff newsletter just that, not the "principal's" newsletter. It should be more than a teachers' bulletin. Make the publication of interest to custodians, cafeteria workers, secretaries, bus drivers, and others of the supporting staff by including items of particular interest to them.
2. Meet occasionally with a staff advisory committee to review past and future concerns of the publication.
3. Avoid propagandizing or presenting one side of an issue on behalf of the school board or the district administration.
4. Create opportunities for all staff members to share in the content of the publication.
5. Do not avoid controversial issues facing the school. But be careful to present all responsible views on such subjects.
6. Try to break major news of great concern to staff members directly through the newsletter, rather than having them read or hear about it first in the local media. Issue an "extra" if the usual newsletter production schedule will not permit coveraga of a fast-breaking news item.
7. Use the newsletter as an educational device by publishing materials about inservice training.
8. Try to use photographs of staff in the publication.
9. Help writers steer clear of group criticism ("Not enough teachers attend PTA meetings . . . Some people aren't filling out reports right," etc.). Encourage them to write in a positive manner about ways to solve problems.
10. Try to develop an identifiable and attractive format so that all staff members will recognize the publication when they see it.

You want to reach all the staff, not just professional or certified staff. An informed secretary or custodian can be as effective a public relations emissary for the school as a teacher. Don't slight the support staff, either, in the selection of information or in the recognition of achievement.

Schools are often one of the largest employers, if not the largest employer, in a local community. A regular newsletter from the principal's office to the staff is a must for the effective and efficient operation of the school's programs. This memo could be placed in all employee pay envelopes — some 26 times a year in most schools. This publication should include:

- Reports of board action or proposals. (Such memos should be delivered to the staff the day after the board meeting.)
- Announcements of new staff, retirements, transfers, etc.
- Review of new or proposed policies, regulations and guidelines.
- School calendar items and coming events.
- Proposed state and federal legislation affecting education.
- Idea sharing for teachers and staff concerning curricula, teaching and other practical tips.
- Recognition of staff awards, achievements, training opportunities, scholarships, etc.

### Community newsletter

A regular newsletter to the community also is a must. Seldom does a local newspaper provide enough space and coverage for all the school news and information the public needs. The newsletter should be issued frequently, at least monthly, but every two weeks is even better. About 20 issues a year provide for 18 issues during the school year and two other issues — one at the closing and one at the beginning of school.

A community newsletter to all citizens, not just parents, allows the school to explain details and spotlight achievement of staff and students in a manner not usually possible in a commercial newspaper. A good newsletter, four to six pages an issue, ought to include:

- People-oriented news, photographs and events.
- Profiles of key staff.

- Question and answer column.
- Curriculum reviews and feature stories on various activities, programs and unique teaching methods.
- Reports on testing and achievements.
- An alumni column that highlights graduates' activities and accomplishments.
- Review of volunteer programs and other community-business involvement in the schools.
- Progress reports on advisory committees.
- Periodical review of school goals and objectives.

### School calendar

A basic orientation publication, containing essential school information, is very important. This publication can be combined with a school calendar that goes to all parents, businesses, community leaders, local government officials, and civic, fraternal and professional organizations. Examples of such information are:

- Names of principals and teachers with their business phone numbers and addresses.
- Names of board members and their home addresses.
- An overview of how the board operates, meeting dates and times, locations of meetings, how citizens may bring a concern to the board, etc.
- A review of special school services and programs.
- A review of basic school policies, such as kindergarten, study programs, summer sessions, area vo-tech programs, etc.
- Names and addresses of PTA officers, meeting dates and times.

### Parent handbook

A parent handbook is another vital publication and an important bridge between school and home. Often this information can be incorporated into a school calendar. However, many schools feel this needs special treatment. A parent handbook should include information on the following:

- Calendar of events, grading periods, inservice days, parent-teacher conferences and holidays.

- Insurance programs, first aid, health services, communicable diseases, safety drills.
- Student registration, immunization and illness, and pupil absences.
- Student dress codes, student records, discipline, field trips, bus regulations, bus routes and attendance requirements.
- Playground activities, lost and found, personal property, physical education, lunches and administration of medicine.
- Visiting schools, tips for parents to help their children, and where parents can get their questions answered.
- Directory of important telephone numbers and a map of the school outlining neighborhood boundaries.

*Contributed by **Nick Goble**, PSBA assistant executive director, and **Albert E. Holliday**, director of the Educational Communication Center, Camp Hill (PA).*

# A guide to producing successful publications

**How to successfully edit your publications for your readers.**

Whether your publication is circulated to an internal or external audience, keep this principle in mind: Edit the publication for the reader. To do this effectively, you must ask:

- How much do the members of my audience know?
- What might they want to know?
- What should they know?
- How can I present the message to them in an interesting way?

Since all communication must be related to the specific characteristics of your audience members, it is essential to know:

- Their educational levels and occupations.
- Their beliefs and attitudes.
- Their group loyalties and norms.
- Whether they are friendly, hostile or indifferent.



109

### Some major problems to avoid

In analyzing thousands of publications throughout the United States and Canada, the editors of *communication briefings* have discovered several major problems that should be avoided:

- Editing a publication primarily to please a board of directors, a CEO or company officers.
- Reflecting a horn-blowing, self-serving point of view that lacks credibility.
- Failing to tackle subjects and issues that relate to the real-life needs of readers.
- Assuming that readers constitute a captive audience that will thoroughly read a publication just because it is published and circulated free of charge by a company.
- Writing and designing a publication with an institutional tone that lacks the human touch.
- Using words and design elements that make the reader's task difficult instead of easier.

### Content and design — both are important

Editors should treat content and design as equals in the publication equation. Excellent content can be hurt by illegible type, cluttered layout and unintelligible graphics. And the finest design in the world cannot force an audience to read a publication containing articles that fail to capture the interest of readers.

### Content points to keep in mind

**Be sure that every article or item in your publication will interest at least one segment of your audience.** Ask yourself in what way it will be of consequence to members of that segment. Will it affect their pocketbooks? Make them better employees? Satisfy their needs for security? Gratify their curiosity? Help them enjoy life, be healthier, avoid criticism, solve problems?

**Avoid single-topic issues.** Research shows that publications that devote an entire issue to one topic turn off readers who are not interested in the subject. In some instances they could represent a high percentage of your readership. Strive, instead, for a mix of articles that will give all your readers a chance to find subjects of interest.

**Avoid shotgun publications** — those that try to cater to the

needs of more than one public (employees, students, the community, etc.). Experience indicates that these publications often fail to provide enough information to satisfy each public. If budget is a problem, you might compromise by retaining the front and back pages but varying the inside section to suit each audience.

**Try to square the needs of the administration with those of your readers.** If the administration wants a particular story published, try to write it from the readers' point of view. *Example:* A story on safety might contain quotes from employees who tell why they consider it important and how they intend to contribute.

**Protect the credibility of your publication as zealously as you would your personal reputation.** Persuade the administration that you have to tell the truth, that there's often more than one side to a story. If readers perceive even one story as propaganda, they will generalize their feelings to the entire publication.

**A tip for internal publications:** Enlist a member of the workforce to help you prepare them. Research shows that employees will receive the publications better if they are written with the assistance of a peer.

### Layout and design points to keep in mind

Remember that **layout and design should always be functional.** Their job is to enhance the message — not impede it. These concepts also should communicate instantly the relative importance of items on a page and create a personality for the publication in keeping with its types of messages and readers.

**Design publications for both legibility and suitability.** Legibility is concerned with how easy it is for a reader to decipher the words. It is affected by such things as size of type, width of columns, amount of grayness, glare from paper, and so on. Suitability covers the overall impression conveyed by the design and whether the various parts of the layout blend well or clash.

**Caution:** Artists often create aesthetically pleasing designs at the expense of legibility. There's little point in producing an impressive work of art if few people will read it.

**Design a publication for different types of readers.** Only a small percentage of readers pore over every page. Many just skim or browse through pages. So it's vital to produce publications with the skimmers and browsers in mind.

**Suggested approach:** Include concise, eye-catching message units for these readers. And be sure these units communicate the messages you want to get across.

**How:** Use informative headlines (not catchy or cute ones that tend to be cryptic), complete captions on all photos, a blurb or free-floating sentence placed somewhere on the spread, occasional boldface or italic sentences or lead-ins, bullets, boxes and tint blocks over brief copy areas. **Warning:** Don't overdo these devices or you'll produce a cluttered layout.

**Avoid large gray areas that make a publication uninviting.** Readers are turned off by large blocks of printed copy that look difficult for the eye to handle. An easy way to determine if a page design is too gray is to place a dollar bill — both vertically and horizontally — on the page. If it touches only body copy, that area should be redesigned. Use subheads, artwork, narrower columns or something else to overcome the grayness.

**Avoid a layout that looks busy.** Today's harried reader wants simple designs with items that are easy to locate. Reduce the number of elements per page, use fewer but larger photos, reduce multi-deck headlines to a single line. And be sure that each major item stands out well and is easy to spot.

**Make the layout as inviting as possible to the reader.** White space is the key. Strive for 15 to 20% white space in your page layouts. But be sure that the white space doesn't cause elements to "fly apart."

**The technique:** Place more white space on the outside than between the various elements. White space that is trapped within the layout will "force" the elements apart. A generous amount of white space on the outside will serve as a frame to keep things together.

Remember that **many of today's readers** — the television generation — **are visually oriented.** Studies show they want articles heavily illustrated with dramatic photos and illustrations. Strive for photos that show motion; static shots are a turn-off to our nation of viewers. **One possible exception:** elderly citizens. One study disclosed that this age group shows a preference for posed pictures.

*Contributed by* ***Frank Grazian,*** *executive editor,* ***communication briefings,*** *©1986.*

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# Some suggestions for simple, clear writing

**You can "talk on paper" more easily by following some of these suggestions.**

School officials communicate through writing all the time. Clear, simple writing is a learned skill — and often quite a chore. You can "talk on paper" more easily by following some of these suggestions.

**1. Define your audience and purpose.** If you are writing a pamphlet on adult education to be read by nearly all adults, you must ask two questions: What do they **want** to know? What do they **need** to know? You must start with what people want to know in order to build a background for what they need to know. You must get into the reader's shoes and think and feel as he does.

What is your own purpose in writing the material? Do you have five or six key ideas that experts think everyone ought to know about education? What do you want the reader to feel about education, to do about it?

Are you trying to change your reader, or merely remind him about something he is already convinced about? Samuel Johnson is reported to have said that men need reminding more than instruction.

**2. Avoid a lengthy introduction.** Catch your readers' attention quickly. Many introductions are both dull and useless. Your readers may give up before they get to your first point. Use a short introduction, if any, to make quite clear what is coming, the questions that will be answered. This, too, will help you sharpen the logic of the materials.

**3. Tell a logical story.** Study your key points and note the basic arguments and ideas being presented. Are your big ideas clearly outlined and developed, or are they hidden? Could a reader easily remember them and tell them to someone else? Is there a logic of time, cause and effect, etc., that you can use?

**4. Make your key points visible.** Readers should be able to skim your article, see quickly what it says, decide whether they want to read it. Therefore, visual guides can make the article clearer and more inviting. Sometimes you can help the reader by subheads, italics, bold-face or by numbering the points made. You can spread your materials out typographically, make it less dense in appearance by more paragraphing. Aerate your material, let it breathe, let the white paper show up.

**5. Be concise but clear.** Maybe you have covered too much in one article. It is better to fully uncover one point than to cover 10 points. However, a serious article on a serious problem for a serious reader can be long. Indeed one study of agricultural stories showed that long articles released to weekly newspapers were used. Make the article as long as it needs to be.

**6. Make it personal.** Think, then, of writing a personal letter rather than an article. You can make material personal by using conversation in it, by putting people into your story, real names, real places. Notice how personal the stories are in *The Reader's Digest*. Do you usually read the letters column in *Time* or *Newsweek*? They are personal, simple, and nearly everybody can read them.

The dividing line between impersonal reporting and personal reporting is at about the eighth-grade level. When material deals

with a named person and his problems, it tends to be at this level or below. When it deals with impersonal ideas, it tends to be above this level.

**7. Invite reader participation and involvement.** All reading material explicitly or implicitly answers the questions of the reader. Note the effectiveness of the questions and answers in *U.S. News and World Report*. Studies show that they are two or three grade levels easier to read than the rest of the magazine. Effective writing causes the readers to identify themselves with or to involve themselves in the writing.

**8. Use pointed examples.** You can simplify and clarify an article by inserting examples. Many highly condensed articles need illustration, "for examples." These examples may include anecdotes, a more concrete explanation, an illustration that makes an abstract idea concrete. Lazy writers often say: "The reader will think of other examples." This usually means that the writer has run out of them himself. Season writing with anecdotes. You enter the world of the abstract through the door of the concrete.

**9. Simplify the vocabulary.** Avoid mumbo-jumbo or "educationese." You can sometimes substitute short, simple, vivid, easily understood words for the longer Latin or Greek equivalents. Instead of confronting problems, just "face them." A sine qua non is merely "a necessity." A multifaceted problem is "many-sided." A unilateral treaty is a "one-sided treaty." Don't proceed on the assumption. Just "assume."

Avoid polysyllabic profundity which may dazzle but not illuminate. There is no need to dress up the obvious in the finery of the obscure. However, if important and difficult technical words are needed in an article, explain them or put them into a context which suggests their meaning without insulting the intelligence of the able reader. People do like to learn new, hard words. So don't rob them of this unexpected bonus, this enjoyable serendipity. Important hard words might well be repeated in the article.

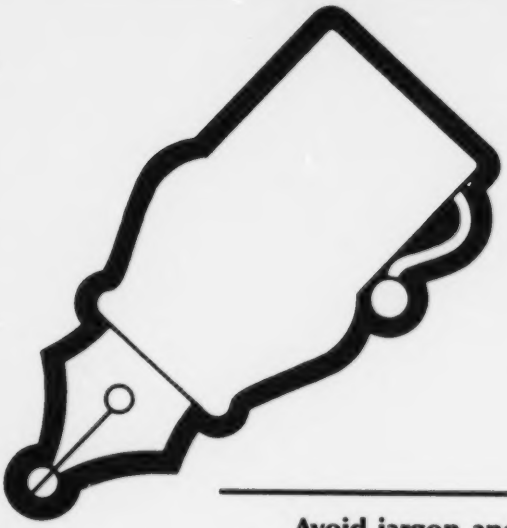
**10. Watch your sentence structure.** Sentences may become too long and too involved by much qualification. This may be necessary when writing for fellow specialists but not for citizens. Remove unnecessary qualification and make necessary qualification

more visible. It is the complexity of the sentence and not its length that is the chief cause of its hardness. Shortening, therefore, may not help but hinder.

You would not make John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* any easier to read by cutting all the sentences in two. Nor would you want to eliminate the qualifications which make sentences long. However, some specialized writing can be changed to make necessary qualifications less cumbersome, more easily seen.

**11. Use visual material of various kinds.** Simple drawings, graphs and maps may sharpen the material. Do not, however, use visual materials just for the sake of using them. You do not always need a picture of an apple when you write about apples. But a map or diagram may do pictorially what is hard to do with words alone. However, many charts and diagrams are too complicated and may need simplification. Their meaning does not leap out at you. An engraving should not be used as a poster. Clarification, not decoration, is the aim.

**12. Repeat and summarize thoughtfully.** As you approach the end of your article you should be answering the readers' questions: So what? Why this extended discussion? What is the author driving at? If it doesn't make any difference, what difference does it make? Don't leave the readers up in the air when they have finished your article. When the article is long, the readers will forget points made earlier. Carry key points along with you, don't drop them abruptly. When you reach the third or fifth points, you may wish to remind the readers what the first and second ones were. In a long article, a summary may recast the key points that have been made. But tell them in a fresh way. Mere repetition is not good enough.



# Be a better writer

**Avoid jargon and "educationese." They're confusing to average readers.**

**Know your audience,** their educational levels and occupations, beliefs and attitudes, group loyalties and norms, and whether they are friendly, hostile or indifferent. Ask these questions: How much does my audience know? What might they want to know? What should they know? How can I present it to them in an interesting way?

**Write for people.** Personalize your message by using you, me, us, we, our whenever you can. Write to be understood — to express not to impress. Write the way you talk, in plain, conversational language.

**Avoid jargon and gobbledygook.** Every profession has its specialized language. "Educationese" is confusing to the people. Although these words may be common to educators, noneducators are not familiar with them. Use other words if possible. If the term must be used, explain it.

**Use familiar words.** When a reader must struggle to understand the message, or needs a dictionary to decipher words, your

words are obscuring the message. Use find for locate, before for prior to, try for endeavor, and so forth. Think simple.

**Use concrete terms.** These are "picture nouns" and "action verbs." Abstract terms such as learning aids and recreational equipment can be stated in concrete terms — films and parallel bars.

**Omit useless words.** Look for any **which** or **be** you don't need. Take out any **which** and make two sentences. Replace **be** or any of its forms (is, are, am, been, was, were) with a strong, active, descriptive verb. Reduce groups of words to a minimum:

| | |
|---|---|
| It is the intent | We hope |
| In the very near future | Soon |
| At this point in time | Now |
| Come in contact with | Meet |
| In view of the fact that | Since |
| Are of the opinion | Believe |

**Check sentence structure.** Use verbs early in the sentence to simplify the sentence. Omit all unnecessary adjectives and adverbs. In a complex sentence, place the main clause first when possible.

**Apply readability formulas.** One of these, the Gunning Fog Index, approximates the grade level at which a person must read to comprehend the materials. To find the fog index:

- Select a sample of 100 to 150 words, ending with a period. Divide the total number of words in the sample by the number of sentences. This will give the average sentence length of the sample.
- Count the number of words in the sample containing three syllables or more. (Do not count ANY capitalized words or three-syllable verb forms ending in -ed or -es.)
- Divide the total of long words by the number of words in the sample to get the percentage of long words.
- Add the average sentence length and the percentage of long words. Multiply this sum by 0.4. This gives you the reading level of the passage.

**Apply readability techniques:** Use words with five letters or fewer; keep sentences to an average length of 17 words; vary sentences to avoid a monotonous rhythm, but keep "short" in mind; prefer simple sentences to compound or complex; prefer active voice to passive.

**Revise and rewrite.** Improvement is always possible.

# Using words and pictures to tell the school story

**The value of well-written, handsomely displayed copy should not be underestimated. Quality photographs attract attention and communicate much more than many people realize.**

Every basic school communication program should include a carefully planned effort using words and pictures to tell the school story. The value of well-written and handsomely displayed copy should not be underestimated. Younger people especially are influenced and motivated by visual effects. Quality photographs attract attention and communicate much more than many people realize.

**What can an already overworked and understaffed principal do about publications?**

1. Understand the importance of publications. Demonstrate that school publications are important.

2. Invite a small student-faculty-parent committee to join in a review of the "products" of the past year.

3. Invite a community advisory committee to meet monthly, quarterly or as needed for review of school publications problems. Include newspaper reporter, PR-type employees from local industry, and parents with related education or experience.

4. Rank publications according to priority. Improve only one at a time — one each year if that is all that is feasible. (Don't try to do it all at once.)

5. Advocate that appropriate teachers be given extra-duty contracts to write about, edit or photograph the school story. Make visible commitment to improved publications.

6. Identify student writers and photographers who can be given released time to work on school publications. Schedule students during club period, activities period or half-day for senior career study program.

7. Arrange with parent volunteers for writing, editing and photography.

8. Be sure to use student newspaper staff as much as possible.

9. Arrange with a local newpaper photographer to buy extra prints for use in school publications.

10. Develop a comprehensive photo file.

11. Build a file of good publications from other schools. Always be able to show that others already do what you strive to accomplish.

**Which publications need your attention most?**

**1. Memos and letters** should be attractive and concise. (Too often school memos and letters sound as though they were dictated by a frantic administrator.)

**2. Parent newsletter.** Is it mailed to parents? If not, most don't arrive at the home.

**3. Student newspaper.** Are administrators quoted? Is the principal's opinion sought? What is the relationship between principal and the student newspaper staff?

**4. Town newspaper.** What is the relationship between principals and newspaper staff — lukewarm, or cordial and cooperative?

**5. Curriculum guide-program of studies.** Descriptions of the academic program must be viewed as the **single most important publication.** Explaining program is top priority.

**6. Student handbook.** The orientation materials given students are second in importance to the curriculum materials.

**7. Award program publications.** Describes the "finished product." Carefully examined by parents.

**8. Special-topic publications.** Each has its own audience. Each must be considered important. Certain readers will judge the school district on the basis of a single publication.

**9. Report card.** Appearance is very important. Is there anything "warm" or humane about the format? Whether mailed or carried by students, the report card is usually a cold computer printout "untouched by humans."

**10. News releases.** How many last week, last month, last year? The school should be the single best source of news by the local newspaper. Did the school send well-written releases on an attractive preprinted form?

Chapter 5

# MEDIA RELATIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

# Working with the news media

**The media are useful to convey information and are a strong influence on public attitude.**

Though news media relations is only one aspect of a total school public relations program, its importance should not be underestimated. Not only are the print and broadcast media useful in our efforts to convey information about budgets, programs and activities, they also are a strong influence on public attitude toward a community's public schools. "Good" press is an asset to student recruitment, staff morale and parent involvement. Conversely, "bad" press can have a devastating impact.

A case can be made to support the contention that schools have traditionally depended heavily on the media. Today, the importance of the media is even greater. The annual Gallup Poll on public education has found that over the last decade the percentage of households with children in public schools — a solid support base — has declined as much as 50% in some areas, from roughly 47% to 25%. In some communities this percentage is now even lower. To maintain broad-based community support, schools must reach out to taxpayers, to residents without children and to those whose children do not attend public schools, as well as to parents.

## Traditional system approach

Develop an annual plan for news media relations with goals, activities, time lines and measurement criteria.

- Use your research to develop goals.
- Develop a policy for district staff.
- Set up a liaison system to your office.
- Supplement written procedures with staff training programs.
- Get to know members of the media.

Clearly the media are an important communication vehicle for these segments of the general population.

Effective media relations should not be left to chance, but should be an integral component of a planned comprehensive school public relations program. Such a plan is based on the traditional systems approach — research, plan, implement and evaluate.

### Conduct basic research

Whether starting a new program or upgrading your present effort, get off on the right foot by conducting some basic research.

**What is news?** News is defined as that which informs or educates, or is timely, significant, unique or of human interest. Yet the relative merits of a news item depend on its relationship or other factors as well as its own objective value.
These other factors include:

- What else is happening in the area.
- How many reporters are available at the time where the news is happening.
- A reporter's or editor's specific interest.
- How the activity is presented to the media (with all appropriate information).

Whether or not news is covered by the media, thus, is always judgmental, based on few hard and fast rules. It has been said that when schools are doing their job well, that is **not** news. However, when schools are not providing a safe environment and when students are not learning, that **is** news. This is clearly an overgeneralization; however, when schools **are** doing their job, the challenge is

to present the positive in a way that capitalizes on the news value:

- Tie the event into a national trend.
- Find a news peg — is this a first?
- Show the significance of the activity to a major community issue.

Some examples of routine news with a twist are:

- A lesson on nuclear war that coincides with an international disarmament conference.
- A school fair that is the last formal activity before that school closes.
- The young refugee who, despite language and cultural barriers, wins a major scholarship.

**Who are your media?** Develop a media directory of writers, editors and publishers who represent the major broadcast and print media in your area — weekly newspaper editors, editors of community newsletters, monthly magazines, editors of company publications and special trade publications. This directory should include the frequency of publication, all deadlines, the number of times of daily newscasts for broadcast media, and key contacts in news, editorial, public affairs and features departments.

**What do the media need from you?** You will get best results if your releases to the media are consistent in style, content and format to that particular medium. The media directory should include information such as the specific geographic area covered by a newspaper, whether or not the newspaper uses submitted photos or has its own staff photographer, whether a television station has a beat reporter, and whether a radio station has appropriate public affairs shows.

**What are your limitations for dealing with the media?** It's best to familiarize yourself with state law and board policy governing freedom of information, open meetings, student privacy rights, and procedures for getting appropriate clearance.

**How successful has your school district been in getting fair and accurate coverage?** Several formal and informal methods you can use:

- Research clip files and conduct a quick content analysis, tabulating inches by subject and tone.
- Conduct analysis to determine if news releases issued by the school are being used by the media.

- Informal discussions with colleagues representing different employee groups and parents.
- Discussion with reporters representing different media.

If you are assuming a new position it would be helpful to conduct a more formal survey or random sample of key publics to determine their assessment of the school's media relations and to solicit their suggestions.

## Planning is important

It is essential to develop an annual plan for news media relations with goals, activities, time line and measurement criteria. This plan should be incorporated into the school's comprehensive public relations plan which in turn should be integrated into the school's overall goals.

**Use your research as the basis for developing goals for news media relations.** The goals should be related directly to a problem or weakness, or a major school thrust. If, for example, coverage in one particular newspaper has been weak, sensational or slanted, a specific goal could be written to achieve more balanced coverage of school issues and activities.

**Develop a policy and procedures for school district staff.** The policy should clearly state the individual or individuals responsible for contact with the media. It also should cover procedures for:

- Initiating news stories.
- Responding to inquiries.
- Crisis communication (both anticipated and unanticipated).

It also is helpful to include sections on "what is news" along with appropriate responses, as well as tips for working with the media. Include a section covering safeguards for protecting student rights of privacy, when parental clearance is needed, and pertinent legal information.

**Set up a system so that each department has a liaison to your office.** An annual training session or informal get-together with these individuals is an effective way to assure them of the importance of these efforts.

**Written procedures should be supplemented, if possible, with a series of staff training programs.** While it is essential that every department head has a reference copy of the policy, you can reinforce

the policy by conducting training programs, perhaps involving reporters in role playing or panel discussions.

Department heads should be encouraged to share the policy with other staff under their supervision. For employees who from time to time are likely to be spokesmen for a particular issue, a videotaped session on dos and don'ts for on-camera interviews can be most helpful. All professional and support staff should be made

## What to do when a reporter calls

Conducting an effective interview with a newspaper, radio or television reporter is a skill that can be learned. Here are some tips:

- **Prepare and practice.**
- **Ask questions.** Learn as much as you can about why you are being interviewed and what information they want.
- **Be brief.** Practice saying everything you know and feel about the interview topic in one sentence, then stretch it out to 20 or 30 seconds. This helps you concentrate on the two or three points that are most important for you to get across.
- **Give your most important points at the beginning of each response.** These concise and isolated statements will be the ones most likely used for broadcasts and the ones a reporter is most likely to write down when taking notes.
- **In a telephone interview, have your points written down and in front of you.**
- **Think fast but talk slowly.** If you are being taped for broadcast, it will help your audience's comprehension.
- **Be conversational.** Frame your answers to the audience's point of view, not your organization's.
- **Let your personality come through.** Make your field interesting to the reporter.
- **Avoid hostility.** Assume the reporter only wants information.
- **Never, absolutely never, lie to a reporter.** A forthright, enthusiastic response to a question conveys candor and confidence.

*Contributed by* ***James L. Graham,*** *president of Issues Management Services, Detroit, Michigan.*

aware of the media relations policy. Your news media effort will be more likely to succeed if all employees understand their specific roles and responsibilities in initiating news media contact or responding to an inquiry.

**Get to know the media** — don't be a voice on the phone. Make an appointment with the editorial boards and those who make up management teams. Share with them basic school information — maps, organizational charts, fact sheets — and listen to their concerns.

- Introduce yourself to other department heads and writers as well as beat reporters. Share with them the same information package which, of course, should be updated annually.
- Also share with all media representatives copies of your district's policies and procedures related to the news media.
- Strategically scheduled meetings with the editorial boards and two or three top-level staff can be most beneficial in promoting a sense of mutual understanding and making sure they understand the school district's point of view.
- Invite reporters in for a school lunch, for a specific story idea or for a general background session. Do this regularly.

### Evaluation completes cycle

With evaluation, which overlaps with research, the cycle is complete. Evaluation criteria should be established for each goal and each goal should be assessed periodically to determine if the strategies selected are having the desired effect. Some possible evaluation tools are:

- Research studies, such as content analyses.
- Public attitude surveys.
- Level of participation at a particular event or level of response to a particular public service announcement.
- Informal feedback from various publics — reporters, staff and parents.

In essence, the same tools used for basic research also can be used for evaluation.

### Effective media relations

When planning strategies for news media relations, think broadly. There are many avenues to consider in addition to the

traditional news release. The editorial page offers ample opportunity for letters to the editor or opinion pieces. If you plan ahead you can develop public service announcements to advertise a specific program, or you can talk with the producer about planning a public affairs show around a specific topic. First, whatever you choose, there are general dos and don'ts for effective news media relations:

- **Use proper format** for a news release, public service announcement or any other standard material for the news media. (See **For print media** following.)
- Always keep deadlines in mind. Deadlines vary depending on the publication schedule. For public service notices and community calendar messages, you may need lead time of two to three weeks. Major news media may have two to three deadlines a day.
- Editors and writers are protective about the independence of the media. When you submit material, **do not ask to review the copy** before it is published.
- **Reporters cannot promise that your material will be used** in whole or in part and should not be asked.
- **Don't submit the same information** to two departments in the same newspaper or station.
- **Feature ideas are often considered exclusives.** If you already have submitted an idea to one reporter, give it to another only if the first reporter does not choose to use the idea.
- **Acknowledge a reporter** who has done an excellent job on a tough story with a note and a copy to his or her supervisor.
- **Avoid complaining about insignificant errors.** If an error is misleading or confusing, ask the reporter for a correction. If a complaint is warranted, contact the reporter first then his supervisors, if necessary.
- **Be available for comment** no matter what the hour or topic, but remember you do not have to respond to controversial questions. It is your choice whether or not to answer. Use your judgment. If you need more time to get background or learn the district's position, ask for it.
- **Supply both good and bad news.** To be credible, face tough issues and explain your position succinctly and clearly.
- **Keep in touch with your media contacts** even when you are not

submitting material. You can update them periodically with information packets of new policies, personnel changes and other background information.

**For print media**

**The news release** — News or press releases are used to inform the news media of an upcoming event, project or activity, a report or summary of a meeting that has just occurred, or a follow-up to a previously reported subject, such as the findings of a research study. News releases are generally used as background material by major dailies, but they are often used "as is" by smaller community newspapers. You can, of course, tailor a news release specifically for the broadcast media.

In writing the news release:

## Preparing your news release

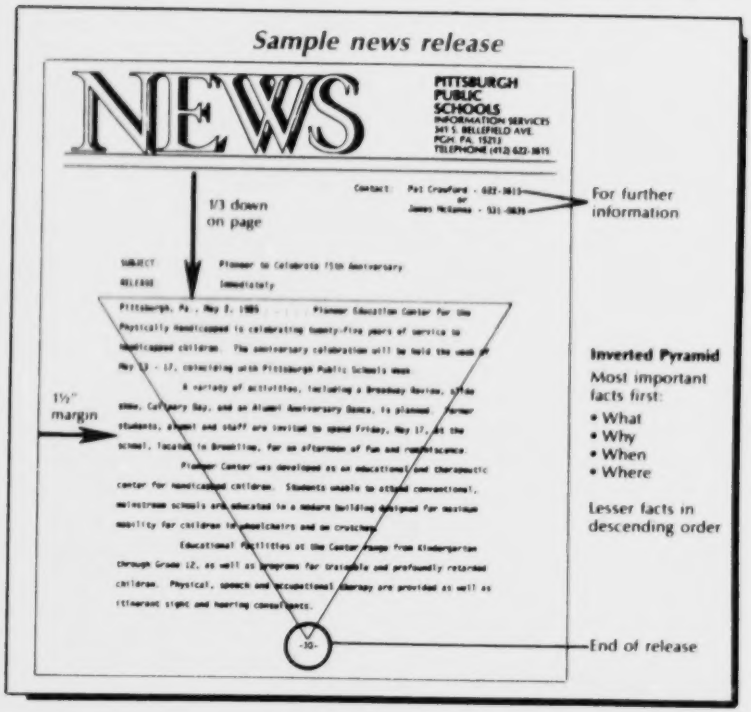
If there were but one thing the editors the country over had in common, it would be an insistence on accuracy. Stories written in longhand invite errors. If it's impossible for you to type your story, print all names, and make certain your penmanship leaves no room for doubt in the editor's mind about the spelling of *any* word in the story.

By following these basic rules when preparing a news story, you will go far in building prestige for yourself in the mind of the editor:

1. Type it double spaced on one side only on 8½"x11" paper.
2. Leave ample (1½") margins, both right and left.
3. At the upper left-hand corner type your name, address and phone number. This will identify you as a news source, and the editor will have no trouble reaching you if he has any questions about the story.
4. Start typing the actual story about one-third of the page, and keep the story short. Most of your stories should be restricted to one page. If the editor wants additional details, he will ask for them.

- Use a standard format with subject, release date, and contact person.
- Type the release double spaced, 8½ x 11 page, single side.
- Begin page 1 of the release one third of the page from the top.
- If the release is longer than one page, type "(more)" at the bottom of the first page and number subsequent pages at the upper left hand corner.
- End the release with the number symbol or "30."
- In writing, use the inverted pyramid format. Begin with the most important facts — who, what, where, when and how — and present lesser facts in descending order.
- All editorial comments should be placed in quotes, attributed to a spokesman. Quotes generally add credibility and interest.
- Follow the style of the news media in writing the release. Use short snappy sentences, one idea to a paragraph, action verbs

*Sample news release*



and active voice. Eliminate unnecessary information, use adjectives sparingly, be concrete and avoid educational jargon.

**Requests for coverage** — If you want press coverage for a coming event, attach a brief memo similar to a fact sheet outlining details of an event. This can be titled "Request for Coverage" and should be sent to assignment editors, news editors or photo editors. Key information should include the five w's — who, what, when, why, and where — and a contact person.

**Feature articles** — Whereas news releases report an event, the feature is designed to add depth and color to news, or to highlight the dramatic or unusual. Interesting classroom activities or personality profiles are typical feature topics.

- Writing style for features can be less structured than for news releases. The lead or beginning should be interesting enough to grab the reader's attention.
- Features can be used to sell an idea to a major daily or used as is.

**Photo release** — Make sure a publication accepts submitted photographs. Most large metropolitan dailies will assign their own staff photographer to cover an important event. However, weekly newspapers and trade publications depend on submitted photos.

- Photos should be black and white, glossy, 8 x 10 or 5 x 7.
- Avoid staged photographs such as handshakes and presentations.
- Make sure the photo meets high technical standards for focus, contrast, and composition.
- Always include a caption to tell the story of the photograph. Include first and last names of all individuals in the photograph. Give the name of your organization, the subject, the release date and the contact person with the caption.
- Tape the caption to the back of the photograph and fold paper over the photo print side out.

### For radio and television

**News release** — Most organizations, including schools, will write one general release for distribution to both the print and broadcast media. You can, of course, tailor the news release specifically for the broadcast media either as a printed script or as an audio or video tape produced through the school district. The key to broadcast news is brevity.

**Public service announcements** — Many radio and television stations devote a designated amount of time for public service to nonprofit organizations or community projects or goals. Generally messages are in specified blocks of time such as 10 seconds (25 words), 20 seconds (50 words), 30 seconds (75 words), or one minute (150 words).

- Public service scripts may be printed on letterhead different than a news release or in some way clearly differentiated from a news release. The script format should include the name of the organization and contact, the subject, the length of the announcement

## Communication dos

- Establish a systematic schedule of contacts each week with print and broadcast media.
- Make an occasional "courtesy call" even when you don't have to. "Is there anything else I can help you with?" Be sincere that you want to be of service.
- Make sure your news releases are objective, factual, concise and accurate.
- When you talk with editors and reporters, be concise, clear and prepared. Always know your subject material and be familiar with specific details. Answer questions completely but don't oversell.
- Have in mind three or four key points you want to make in an interview. If you're not asked for them, interject them as the interview progresses. Always be calm, pleasant and articulate.
- Have visuals on hand for television interviews whenever possible. Talk to the camera like it was a person.
- Keep your news releases brief and timely. Get right to the point. And do as much of their work for them as you can.
- Arrange for an informal meeting of the superintendent, school board and news media at least once each quarter. Good for background and updating current programs.
- Stress the great programs being conducted by your schools with feature stories, photos.
- Invite media and parents to open houses at least once each quarter.

in time and the number of words, and desired air dates — start and "kill." Remember that the message is written to be spoken and should be less formal than a written release. Sentences should not be complicated.

- Type all copy double-spaced, in all caps, and spell out everything in the script — numbers, abbreviations, titles.
- For television script, submit suggested video to accompany the message. The video may include taped footage, slides or a printed message.
- When submitting taped public service messages, also submit a copy of the script in writing. By cover letter, explain the purpose of the announcement and why it is important.
- Submit PSAs three to four weeks in advance of initial air date.

**Crisis communication**

Generally if a school has positive media relations on a day-to-day basis, coverage of crises and unexpected events should be fair

## Communication don'ts

- Lie or misrepresent the facts. Tell the press the truth or nothing at all.
- Be afraid to talk with an editor about an unfavorable article or editorial he or she has written. But use good judgment.
- Promise a story and then not be able to deliver it. Also if a reporter initiates a "scoop" don't give the story to other media.
- Be intimidated by a "tough" editor or reporter, but never argue with them.
- Ask editors to mail your clippings. They don't have the time.
- Complain to editors because they won't use your material. Your job is to feed them information and story ideas.
- Attempt to pressure editors or news directors by using advertisers or other influential people.
- Phone to ask when a particular article will be in the paper.
- Allow yourself to become embroiled in a controversy.

and accurate. Crises can be divided into two categories — those you anticipate, such as labor relations problems, and the unexpected, such as a fire or school fight. In both cases the key to successful crisis communication is planning.

**The unexpected problem** — Make sure your internal reporting lines and responsibilities are clear before any crisis occurs. This plan, which should be reviewed annually, should designate appropriate spokesmen in an emergency and ensure that these individuals have access to the facts. The spokesmen should be:

- Knowledgeable of laws and policies pertaining to freedom of information and student privacy.
- Authorized to compile the facts concerning the incident.
- Accessible to the news media.
- Open, fair and honest with reporters.
- Willing to take the initiative to report the correct information.

**Problems you can anticipate** — For potentially major problems, such as a job action or strike or the implementation of a desegregation plan, extensive planning should be done around that specific issue. Your objectives are to secure fair and accurate coverage, to ensure that the school's position is clearly communicated, and to set up and maintain direct avenues of communication with each target audience. Coordination of media coverage should be centralized to the extent possible. A designated spokesman should:

- Prepare background fact sheets and press kits for the media.
- Set up a communication center as a press area for the dissemination of all official releases and statements. (The center could also serve as a collection point for key information coming in from various schools.)
- Hold briefings with editorial boards and reporters in advance of the action.
- Make sure key personnel are aware of the special procedures.

*Contributed by **Patricia A. Crawford**, public information officer, Pittsburgh Public Schools.*

# How to avoid mediaphobia

**Tips and reminders for dealing effectively with the electronic media.**

School officials never know when they may be "ambushed" by the electronic media. Whether it's an instant crisis or a planned interview, there are several points educators need to remember when dealing with television and radio.

Carol Ann Kell is a former television reporter and now works with business, industry and other organizations, providing consultation for issues management. Her tips are excellent reminders for dealing with the media.

- Never say "no comment".
- Never go off the record unless you have known the reporter a very long time and trust him or her.
- Give concise, to-the-point answers.
- When you are asked two or three questions in one, sort them out as you answer each so the audience is not confused. There is nothing wrong, if you forget the second or third question, with asking the host to repeat it.
- Try to think, especially when talking for radio, in 20-second answers that are easy to edit — that way you're less likely to be quoted out of context.

- Speak directly, rather than passively.
- Be friendly but keep your sense of authority.
- Be sincere — it really comes across on the air.
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" to a question. It's OK as long as you say "I will find out that answer and get back to you." If it's a question you can't answer because it's being litigated, say so.
- Have your energy level high without appearing nervous or frantic when appearing on camera. Also, remember your posture and grooming — the camera catches it all.
- Don't think because you are being interviewed by a newspaper reporter that you aren't being observed — you are, from the biting of your nails to the tapping of your foot. Also, keep any sensitive papers out of sight.
- Focus on the **subject** you are talking about, not the situation. Try to forget the fact that you are being taped or that thousands of people are listening or watching. When on a TV interview show, try to imagine yourself in someone's living room, having a conversation.
- Never look at the camera. Let the professionals worry about angles. Always look at the host.
- Watch out for trick questions. Sometimes reporters will quote "sources" that have made allegations against you or your organization that simply aren't accurate. Don't be afraid to be firm (but always polite) in asking where the information came from, and if the reporter won't tell you, simply say it's untrue, without merit and make that the end of it; and explain the right answer.
- Never lose your temper, no matter how wild the charges or accusations an interviewer or another guest may level. The person who remains cool on the firing line is the one who "wins" in the viewer or listener's mind.
- Remember, **you** are the authority on your subject — and if asked a question that is way off base, feel free to work around it by giving a nonanswer or say "I'm not exactly sure what you mean but here's what I think about **this** issue" and score your points.
- Remember that the interviewer or reporter always has the last word, since he or she can edit your material any way they want once you go on tape (except of course when you are "live").

So don't try to take control of how things happen on a TV or radio show — but be sharp and ready to put your viewpoints across in a manner that lends itself to an editing process that reflects positively on you.

- Without being flattering, it's good to be friendly with reporters (they're people too), although many skeptical hard-boiled reporters may put you off.
- Unless the subject matter is about totally no-nonsense matters, allow your sense of humor to show through when appropriate. That doesn't mean cracking jokes every other sentence — but do let your "humanness" emerge.
- Practice ahead of time by asking yourself the questions you hope won't be asked — then **answer** them. Also, practice getting information across that is on your agenda, and think of ways you might turn predictable questions into the ones you wish to speak to.
- Make sure you don't use "in-house jargon"; don't use words that are known to insiders but not to the world at large.
- Be conscious of space fillers like "you know," "basically," "uh," and all the little word crutches that people use when they are nervous.
- It is fine, when asked a question that requires some thought, to sit there and think about your answer. Don't take too long, that could be awkward, but don't jump right in and later be sorry because your answer was not succinct or did not speak to the issue at hand.
- Don't be afraid to ask an interviewer what he or she means if you don't understand the question. Also, if you are being questioned aggressively in a rather unpleasant way, don't be afraid to ask some questions of your own, or make a statement. "I'm here to give information to the viewers, but I feel as though I'm being badgered instead." If true badgering is going on, the audience will likely go to your side, if you are being consistently polite throughout.
- Avoid being dull — be as interesting as you really are.

*Excerpted from a presentation to the Delaware County Center for School Leadership (December 1985), sponsored by Delaware County Intermediate Unit and presented by* ***Carol Ann Kell & Associates****, Effective Media Communications, Philadelphia, PA.*

# When things get hot: Crisis handling

**In a crisis, people want frank, truthful answers based on accurate information. They want responsiveness.**

Despite all your planning, despite all your work with the media, despite your careful cultivation of a professional working relationship, there will still be events which strain or tax that two-way co-operation. It may be a strike, a controversial board meeting, an aroused parent group or one of a number of other problems. You need a well-developed plan of action to meet crisis periods. You need to:

- Have a media policy worked out in advance. Clearly spell out who will be the spokesperson to the media. Make it clear that no one else may speak for the schools or agency.
- Route all media calls to one person, or at least to one office.
- Prepare a statement covering the particular crisis situation. When media inquiries come in, read or distribute the statement to them. This will help maintain consistency of comments.
- Anticipate media questions and prepare and rehearse answers

to them. Play devil's advocate and develop answers to all the touchy questions you can.

• Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." It's a lot better than being caught in a lie. Promise an answer within a specific time if possible and follow through.

• Be brief. Don't cloud the issue with reams of data, or superfluous information. Keep comments to the point, and keep reiterating them.

• Start a rumor control center if the situation warrants it. Publish a phone number for members of the public to call if they hear a rumor or need information.

• Consider a special unlisted number for media representatives to call in case traffic is heavy on your regular lines.

• Keep total staff — professional and "professional support staff" — informed with inside information. They have a major stake in the outcome of any crisis. When media start reporting on trouble in the schools, community members will probably call friends who work in the schools to get "the real story." If staff members know what's happening, each one becomes a valuable part of the rumor control center.

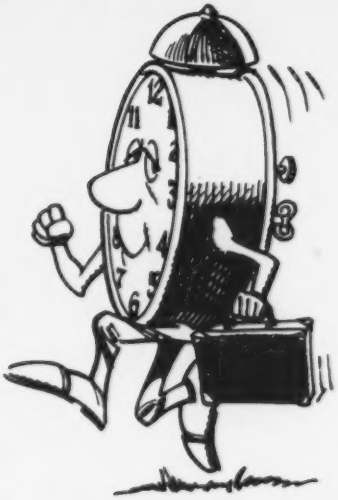
• Put a crisis team together. One person cannot handle a crisis alone. Delegate and clearly designate responsibilities to others.

• Keep calm and maintain a professional manner. Many questions from the media will be designed to break down your answers. Reporters will ask the same question several ways to try to elicit contradictory answers. Speak the truth slowly, calmly and consistently; repeat your facts.

***Basic School PR Guide: Working with the Media,*** *National School Public Relations Association, 1980.*

Chapter 6

# SELF-DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES



# Managing time

**By spending time wisely, we can reduce stress, get more done, have more time for ourselves and acquire a sense of accomplishment.**

Someone once said: "Only Robinson Crusoe got everything done by Friday."

How many Fridays have you become frustrated because you're looking at a pile of unfinished work? You're not alone. You begin to think, "If I only had more time." And again you're not alone. Many busy people have the same thought. And you know what? It's a myth to think you can get more time. There isn't any more time. We're given only 24 hours a day. No more. Furthermore, we can't save it and put it in the bank to use later.

The answer then is not looking for more time but spending wisely what's available. We need to manage our time better. If we do, we can reduce stress, get more done, have more time for ourselves and acquire a sense of accomplishment.

Here are some suggestions for managing your time better:

• **Make a commitment** — Mastering time management is like dieting, improving your golf game or giving up cigarettes. You need to motivate yourself before you start and be determined that you're going to get organized.

• **Start from scratch** — Before setting up a time management program, take a day or two and get everything caught up as much as possible. Clean the top of your desk of all "action" items and papers.

• **Get back on track** — Be resolved that you're going to get back on your time management schedule when you fall off. And you will be off your schedule from time to time.

• **Set goals** — Put in writing your short and long-range goals for yourself. Without goals, time management is useless. What do you want completed in six months, a year and beyond? Many time management programs overlook this point. It's the most important part of time management.

• **Analyze your use of time** — Using 15 minute blocks, log what you've done for two or three days. Make entries every hour, if possible, otherwise you'll forget what you've done. With the log completed, analyze how you've spent your time. How many interruptions did you have? When did you get to your major task during the day? How much time did you spend at lunch? When did you do your most work? Are you spending too much time getting ready for work?

• **Start planning your activities** — With the knowledge you have from analyzing your time and with your goals in mind, decide what you want to have completed by the end of this week, next week and the week after next. Put these objectives on a sheet of paper for each week.

• **Make up a daily "To Do" list** — List all the activities for today and for as many days ahead as possible. No activity should be listed that will not lead to your weekly objectives and to your ultimate goals. Otherwise, you're like a passenger who's on the right bus but going the wrong direction. Peter Drucker, a well-known management expert, points out that it's better to do the right thing than a thing right.

• **Rank your activities** — Each day, rank activities on the "To Do" list "A", "B", or "C". As are things that must get done today; Bs have to be done, but can wait; and Cs are activities that if you ignore them they might go away. Next, rank activities with each letter, such as A-1, A-2, A-3 and so on. Complete the activities in that order and you'll be surprised how good you feel about yourself at the end of the day. Don't be fooled into doing a lot of activities that take very little time, before you get to your A-1 for the day. If you do, you'll find the day has gone by and A-1 is still waiting.

• **Control interruptions** — They are part of everybody's life. Some are part of your job and others are not. Learn to accept those that are part of your job, but control those that are not. People are your greatest interrupters. Have only one or two chairs in your office so time-wasters can't perch too long. Better yet, put a brief case or papers on each so they can't sit down. Also, if you see them headed for your office, catch them in the corridor and talk to them there.

• **Bunch your return phone calls** — Wait for a suitable time when you need a break and make the most of your return calls.

• **Delegate** — A sure way of getting more time is to delegate as much of your work as possible. The higher one rises in management, the more work must be delegated.

• **Avoid procrastinating** — A five-minute task on your desk today, looks like a 15-minute task later in the week. And it grows as time goes by. Acquire a "do it now" approach to many activities. Also, do your most unpleasant task as early as possible in the day. If you don't, it will haunt you all day. If you're not in the mood to do a comprehensive task, break it into parts and do some of it. If you need to paint a room and you're not in the mood, at least pick the colors or buy the paint or gather your tools for the job. Make your moods work for you.

• **Get a handle on paperwork** — The best way to handle paperwork is not to let papers get to your desk. Get your name off mailing lists. Have someone sort your papers before they get to your desk. Take a speed-reading course.

• **Dictate** — Answer your mail as you open it by dictating an answer immediately.

• **Reduce paper traffic** — Handle a piece of paper only once if possible. If not, at least take some action before putting it into your "pending" file. Set up a conference, request information, make a phone call, etc.

• **Use waiting time** — Travel time on planes and trains give you a golden opportunity to plan, read and answer mail. Likewise time in a doctor's office can be used to shorten a daily "To Do" list.

• **Plan some fun time** — Schedule some "me time" daily to relax or to do some physical activity. This is an area workaholics ignore. Usually, they are very poor managers of time.

• **Write it down** — Jot action items down on a 3 × 5 card or record them on a pocket dictating machine. Likewise, capture on tape ideas that you want to remember later.

• **Conduct short "stand-up" meetings** — When people stand, they don't waste too much time in meetings. You'll be surprised at how much can be accomplished quickly in such a get-together.

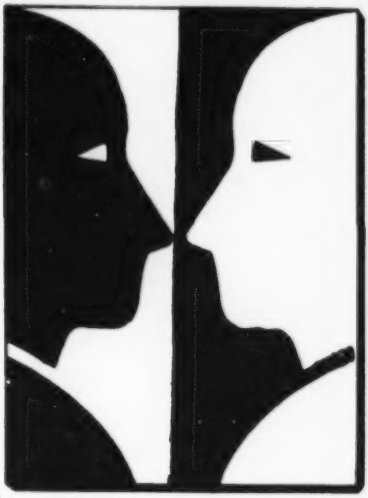
• **Avoid unnecessary meetings** — Just because a weekly meeting is scheduled throughout the year doesn't mean that it should be held every week. If there's nothing to meet about, don't have a meeting. If you have to ask at the weekly meeting what the participants want to discuss, then you don't need to meet. An agenda should be determined before the meeting, not at it.

You'll observe after getting your time management in the groove that, in the past, you were trying to do too much. A lot of it was not leading to your objectives and goals. And you became frustrated on Fridays. With these suggestions on time management you may not have to open your briefcase from Friday to Monday.

*Contributed by* ***Donald R. Gallagher,*** *professor of communications at Glassboro (NJ) State College.*



145



# Face to face communication is still the best

**This type of communication allows for direct feedback and embodies the true human dimension for people to meet and get to know others on a person-to-person basis.**

Commercial television, radio, closed-circuit television, tape cassettes, slide-tape presentations and the telephone — all are excellent means of conveying information between people. But none of these is potentially as effective, productive and rewarding as one person talking face-to-face with another, or 10 or even 1,000 others.

Face-to-face communication is immediate — "right now" process — allowing for direct feedback, either through body language, vigorous questions and answers, confrontation or dialogue. Face-to-face communication embodies the true human dimension in which people have opportunities to meet and get to know others on a person-to-person basis.

On national, regional or statewide levels, face-to-face commu-

nication is impractical — presidential candidates spend millions of dollars criss-crossing the nation trying to press hands together and meet people where they live, but their gestures are largely symbolic; they must rely upon the electronic media to try to convey their messages.

Fortunately, a public school's community usually encompasses a relatively small geographic area, and it is still possible to meet with people in small group settings to discuss important education matters on a highly personal level. By making arrangements to appear before the local PTA, the Rotary Club, the League of Women Voters, the Uptown Garden Club, the Methodist Study Club, the Downtown Civic Association and other community groups, principals can carry their messages to the citizenry in settings best suited for profitable exchanges of ideas.

Face-to-face communication is not without its handicaps. It takes time. Making arrangements and traveling to and from a speaking place takes effort. Preparing a speech to meet the needs of a certain audience requires research and preparation. Handling tough questions from an audience takes finesse and "doing your homework." Some citizens, however, don't attend meetings, and so it is impossible to get to meet everyone in a community via the public speaking route.

But benefits of seeking to carry the school message directly to the people far outnumber the handicaps. With some planning and preparation, principals can have a major impact in the community and help advance the educational program for young people.

*Contributed by* ***Albert E. Holliday,*** *director of the Educational Communication Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations.***

# Tips on recalling names and faces

**Self-help suggestions on how to remember the people you meet.**

Recalling names and faces might seem a simple matter, but it isn't. Trouble is, most names have no logical "connection" to faces. Tony Buzan, author of *Use Your Perfect Memory,* offers the following steps for remembering the people you meet.

• **Develop a mental test.** Tell yourself your memory is going to improve. Conversely, if you keep reminding yourself that you have a bad memory for names and faces, your memory will prove that you're absolutely right. So prepare yourself to meet people: When you're poised and relaxed, your memory works better than if you're harried and nervous.

• **Observe.** Look people straight in the eye; concentrate on facial characteristics and other details that will help you remember individuals later. "Blank looking," according to Buzan, is a major cause of poor memory.

• **Listen.** Pay attention. Concentrate on the sound of the per-

son's name. Don't concentrate on the fact that you never remember names.

• **Ask to hear the name again.** Even if you heard the name fairly well, say, "I'm sorry, would you mind repeating your name?" Repetition, advises Buzan, is a key memory aid.

• **Verify the pronunciation.** Ask if you have the right pronunication of the person's name. Don't be embarrassed: Even a seemingly simple name might be pronounced in an unusual way, says Buzan. And once again, you'll get to repeat the name and burn it a little deeper into your memory.

• **Ask how it's spelled.** Here's another chance for repeating the name.

• **Ask about its derivation.** The person you meet usually is flattered that you're interested enough to ask about the history of his family name. This is another chance for repetition — but by adding more information to what you know about the person, you're also helping your memory be more effective.

• **Exchange cards.** Seeing the name in writing helps you remember. Later, incorporate the business cards you collect into your Rolodex, and you'll be another step ahead.

• **Repeat the name in conversation.** You'll involve the person more intimately in the conversation — and implant the name even further in your memory.

• **Repeat it internally.** During brief pauses in conversation, practice in your head the name you've heard. And during longer pauses, check up on yourself: Repeat the name again, and remind yourself of other details you've learned about the person.

• **Repeat it at parting.** As you say goodbye, use the person's name one final time.

# Ways to listen

**Listening is easy. Here are 10 short, minimal effort tune-in techniques.**

Someone once said that next to "I love you," the three most important words are "What's your opinion?" That may not be entirely true. Communication people think, for example, that "What's your opinion?" are the three most important. But what is true is that listening — asking people's opinions — is the heart of good communication.

And best of all, listening is easy. To illustrate, here are 10 short, minimal effort tune-in techniques to help you learn what's happening "out there."

### Key communicators

Identify people in your community who can help get school information out . . . and in. Anybody qualifies: parents, non-parents, businessmen, senior citizens and others. People who talk to people regularly are prime candidates. Invite them in. Tell them about your schools in two hours or less. Put them on a VIP mailing list. And then ask them to call your if they need school information, have a question or have heard a rumor. Key communicator groups can include a few people or hundreds.

### Dialogue

Similar to key communicators, this program has more administrative "control." Pick one person from each school attendance area. Invite the parent group to elect or select another, and then have those two pick a third. Have them all come to a central location and tell them everything there is to tell about the school. Explain the budget, tell what you do, share progress and problems, and entertain questions. Then ask Dialogue volunteers if you can have people call them when they have questions or need information. Dialogue volunteers can answer the questions or call an office contact person who'll get the word back. Meet with volunteers monthly to tell them what's new . . . both the good and the bad. And have them share what they've heard with you.

### Question cards

Place 4"× 6" "I Have a Question" cards in your building and in key locations around the community. Promise people who send them to you that they'll receive an answer within 24 hours.

### Idea cards

This time the card is headed "I Have an Idea" — an idea that will improve the school. Promise people they will hear from you within seven days after you receive their idea, and then make sure they do hear.

### Surveys

Do an opinion poll. Telephone surveys are relatively easy, and they're quick, inexpensive and accurate. They should be conducted regularly to assess what people are thinking. Information gained can help in the shaping of goals and objectives . . . and in crisis avoidance.

### Tape systems

Many schools have a one-minute prerecorded telephone message to provide callers with school news. Carry it one step further. Have people stay on the line to ask their questions. Call them back the next day with an answer. (They'll be so surprised they'll become iron-clad school supporters.)

**Parent-teacher phone calls**

Divide up the parents in your school among the teachers. During the year make sure every parent gets a good news call. Ask them what they think about your school and what kinds of information they want. (You can have prepared information on various phases of your program like "Here's what we're doing in reading, or math, or science, or whatever." You can put the appropriate one in the mail after the call is completed. Color that responsiveness.)

**Listener bureau**

Invite the "power structure" to breakfast. Give them 10 minutes worth of school information. And then listen to them. Appreciated. Informative.

**Staff listening sessions**

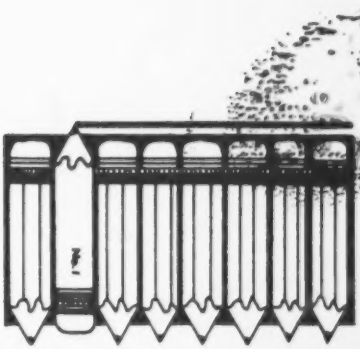
Get out . . . get around. Learn what staff members are thinking. Pop in on their time, on their turf, during lunch, breaks, inservice. Hear what they have to say about the district. Show them you care. Good public relations. Better human relations.

**Petite polls**

Steal ideas from the pros. Modify the "polls" hotels and airline people use, the ones that ask if your experience has been satisfactory and what could have been done to improve it. No cost. Easy. Effective. Do them every chance you have, like after parent-teacher conferences.

Maybe the three most important words aren't "I love you," or "What's your opinion," but "You are needed."

*Contributed by* ***William J. Banach,*** *ASPR, administrative director of Macomb Intermediate School District, Mt. Clemens, MI, and a past president of the National School Public Relations Association.*



# How to write so you'll be understood

**Learn to write so readers can grasp the message quickly.**

Much poor writing stems from the failure to recognize that good writing is essentially "talking on paper." And it's made worse by the belief that big words and long sentences make one appear more dignified and more professional.

The written word will always remain a vital form of communication between the schools and the public. Principals must write numerous reports and statements for public consumption. Unfortunately, much of the writing is foggy, jargon-laden, wordy, dull and too complex for the average reader. It tends to be loaded with weak verbs, abstract terms, involved sentences, vague phrasing and boring instructions.

Principals must learn to write so readers can grasp the message quickly. Most readers tire easily and won't work to dig out the message. The techniques suggested here will help transform a murky communication into a readable one.

## Know your audience

All communications must be related to the specific characteristics, needs and interests of the audience. It is essential to know

their educational levels and occupations; their beliefs and attitudes; their group loyalties and norms; and whether they are friendly, hostile or indifferent. You should never send a message unless it's tailored to fit the audience. Asking yourself the following questions before writing will help:

- How much does my audience know?
- What might they want to know?
- What should they know?
- How can I present it to them in an interesting way?

Research shows the average person reads either to escape boredom or to be rewarded. So — to get maximum impact — your message must provide a benefit for readers on their terms. And the benefit must be indicated to them immediately, or they'll lose interest.

Get to the point right away; long introductions bore readers. Research shows that readers will often stay with you for a 500-word message if you can interest them to read beyond the first 50 words. Conversely, most readers stop reading before 50 words — unless they identify the subject with their own interests.

## Avoid jargon

Every profession has its jargon or specialized language, and education is no exception. When used among educators, jargon sometimes speeds up communication. When aimed at lay citizens, it merely confounds and befuddles them.

Suppose a physician were to tell you "the retraction of dendrites produces a break in the synaptic connections." Or suppose a printer were to mention that "a ligature will prevent damage to the kerns." Confused? Then why expect lay citizens to be less confused with terms such as "distributive education," "paraprofessional," "articulation," "multimedia" and "resource person?" If you must use specialized terms, either put them in a context that indicates their meaning, or explain them as they are introduced. For example: "Resource centers — formerly known as libraries — now contain globes, films, records and charts in addition to books and magazines." Also, avoid those jargon-laden cliches that smack of gobbledygook — writing that suffers from a swelling of its parts.

### Use familiar words

Always use words you're sure an audience will understand. There's no point in obscuring a message with long words that send a reader to the dictionary or to the evening newspaper for relief. The tendency to be pompous and to display one's vocabulary must be resisted. Short and easy-to-understand words — those with Anglo-Saxon roots — communicate effectively with most audiences.

Winston Churchill, facing Hitler's armed forces in 1940, said to Americans: "Give us the tools, and we will do the job." He did not say, "Supply us with the necessary inputs of relevant equipment, and we will implement the program and accomplish its objectives." Churchill's vigorous language helped to lift his nation to victory in the face of defeat.

Some writers use long, pompous words in the mistaken belief that such words add dignity and strength to their messages. More often, they make the writer appear stuffy and unapproachable. Even worse, they force the reader to struggle too hard to get the message. Where possible, substitute words such as "try" for "endeavor," "total" for "aggregate," "end" for "terminate," and "best" for "optimum."

### Use concrete terms

Fowler, in "The King's English," urges writers to "be direct, simple, brief, vigorous and lucid." He also tells them to prefer the concrete word to the abstract. This is good advice because readers — even educated ones — prefer terms they can picture. Abstract words and phrases often confuse readers or mislead them into believing that they understand what the writer means. They also leave the door open to interpretations the writer never anticipated.

The advice to use concrete terms in no way implies that abstractions or generalizations always should be avoided. They are often necessary when introducing an idea or a concept. But they should be followed — when possible — with specific, concrete examples or descriptions to ensure clarity.

### Apply readability formulas

Readability formulas have been devised that rate writing on a scale ranging from very-easy-to-read to very-difficult-to-read. One

of these — the Gunning-Meuller Fog Index — reduces everything to a number that approximates the grade level at which a person must read to comprehend the material. For example, writing with a Fog Index of 10 is aimed at those who read at or above the tenth grade level.

To determine the Fog Index, take a 100 word sample of something you've written and apply these steps:

1. Find the average number of words per sentence in the sample. (If the final sentence in the sample runs beyond the 100th word, use more than 100 words to compute the average for this step.)

2. Count the number of words in the 100 word sample containing three syllables or more. (Do not count proper nouns or three-syllable verb forms ending in -ed or -es.)

3. Add the average number of words per sentence to the number of words containing three or more syllables and multiply the sum by 0.4.

For example: A 100 word passage contains an average of 20 words per sentence and 10 words of three or more syllables. The sum of these two factors is 30 (20 plus 10). Multiplying 30 by 0.4 gives a Fog Index of 12.

In applying the formula, take note of these findings:

- The average American reads at the ninth grade level. However, many read below that level.
- Most readers feel more comfortable reading at one or two levels below their maximum.

**Watch sentence structure**

Educators and other professionals tend to qualify too much when writing. This stems from the desire to make the communication as clear as possible. However, qualifications often result in torturous sentences that have the opposite effect — especially when writing for lay citizens. The cure: Check every qualification to see if it's necessary for the audience. Omit unnecessary ones and place the required ones into separate sentences where possible.

Placing the verb early in the sentence also will help simplify sentence structure. Holding it to the end keeps the reader wondering about — and sometimes losing — the main point.

Another suggestion to simplify sentence structure: Where possible, place the main clause first when using complex sentences. This will give the reader a frame of reference to apply when reaching the subordinate clause, which qualifies or modifies the main clause.

**Additional writing tips**

Here are additional techniques to help your writing communicate:

• Avoid useless words that contribute nothing to meaning. They delay the message and fatigue the reader. Don't write: "It is our opinion that at the present time 80% of our high school students are in a financial position to attend college." Instead, write: "We believe that 80% of our high school students now can afford to attend college." Saving: eight words.

• Use strong verbs and the active voice where you can. Strong verbs impart vigor to sentences, and the active voice adds to clarity and movement. Also, substitute verbs that depict motion for parts of the inactive verb "to be" (is, are, and so forth) — especially when those verbs function as main verbs in a sentence.

• Don't overtax verbs with too many nouns and adjectives. An example: "The continuous progress concept of education with its emphasis on individualized instruction *has generated* wider usage of audiovisual services in our schools." That single verb simply cannot support the load. Additional verbs or verb forms must be introduced by changing some of the phrases into clauses or by breaking the sentence up into two sentences. Merely adding one more verb will help improve the example somewhat — even though the sentence is still loaded with jargon and abstractions: "The continuous progress concept of education, which *emphasizes* individualized instruction, *has generated* wider usage of audiovisual services in our schools." As a rule, strive to inject one active verb for every 10 words.

*Excerpted from* ***School Communications: Ideas That Work*** *by* ***Don Bagin, Frank Grazian*** *and* ***Charles H. Harrison,*** *© 1972*

# Four steps to success in public speaking

**Build on your audience's goodwill, return their warmth, and your relationship with your listeners will begin on an upbeat note.**

In the late 1970s, America saw the development of a back-to-basics movement. Its supporters called for a focus on "reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic." Unfortunately, a fourth R — rhetoric — in its classic sense — has never been part of the educational foundation. While young citizens certainly need to learn how to read, write and calculate, they have as great a need to learn how to communicate orally. But for the past 20 or 30 years, educators have not stressed oral communication skills in the classroom, and even college graduates enter the marketplace without the ability to make an engaging and worthwhile presentation before an audience.

The legacy has been a majority of adults, who do not relish an assignment to speak before an audience. The authors of *The Peo-*

*ple's Almanac* report that speaking before an audience is **the** greatest fear of most people.

Public speaking, however, does not need to be a traumatic event in anyone's life, especially if the four steps to speaking success are known.

## 1 Begin with a smile

An audience likes nothing more than to be greeted by an enthusiastic, confident presenter. This implies to the audience that the speaker is well-prepared, enjoys the experience and has something worthwhile to say.

Members of an audience come prepared to have a profitable time and they bring with them a great deal of predisposed goodwill toward those they will listen to. As you prepare to speak, plan to build upon this audience goodwill. Return their warmth via a confident manner — justified by knowledge and good preparation — and your relationship with your listeners will begin on an upbeat note.

## 2 Organize your presentation carefully

Excellent speakers structure their speeches so that listeners will have good recall of their main points a month or two later.

Several ways in which this might be accomplished are:

• **By presenting a strong, clear, to-the-point opening that sets forth the main idea of the speech.** This is done right after the speaker acknowledges the introduction by the master of ceremonies — "Thank you, Mr. Smith, for your kind introduction. Mr. President, honored guests and ladies and gentlemen: Midtown Public School needs your help, and I'm here tonight to ask you to come to our aid . . ." The opening sets the tone for your presentation and alerts the audience regarding the direction in which you are headed. Don't chit-chat, tell jokes, or apologize because you didn't have enough time to plan. Go right to the point.

• **Clearly delineate the three or four sections or areas of the body for your speech** (even to the extent of labeling them 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C), such as: "The first way you can help us is with ideas —

we have a major financial hurdle in front of us this year and we must soon either raise taxes, or cut services and programs. But we need your ideas to guide us. If we cut services, which should they be? . . . etc."

What you are seeking is to "stick" the essentials of your message in a listener's mind so that when that person goes home and a spouse or associate asks, "What did Mr. Jones have to say?" the listener would say — "They've got some financial difficulties and want to know whether to raise taxes or cut back in areas such as . . . etc."

Clear delineation of the body of the speech is required for a persuasive or stimulating speech, such as in the previous example, as well as for the general information speech. But keep the sections to three or four, which is about all that can adequately be covered in the time usually available.

• **Call for definite action on the part of listeners in your conclusion.** Give concrete suggestions — what they can or should do to support your ideas or point of view, or to learn more about the subject.

## 3 Illustrate your speech graphically

The best abstract principles and the wisest generalities will fall on unreceptive ears unless you illustrate them in terms and references the audience can comprehend.

Those people we identify as excellent speakers possess one characteristic — they have the ability to relate their ideas to ours. They do this by using a variety of examples and real-life experiences, many of which have application to **our own** lives, to explain **their** theories. They paint mental pictures for us and by so doing, give us the human dimension, leading us to think, "He sure hit that nail on the head."

This can be done by telling anecdotes, referring to real-life situations (not jokes), the use of quotes, testimony and figures of speech. These references give the audience an insight into the theory (or statement of fact) by showing how it operates or how it can be put to use or its application in reality. In some cases, natural humor is appropriate; in others, use statistics, quotes of peo-

ple, references to books or authorities or true life situations.

If your point is that continued operation of an elementary school hit by declining enrollment is not warranted, give ample evidences — statistics, costs, projections, etc. or other factual information.

If your point is that an alternative school week is justified, tell what students and teachers would be doing during the school day and what benefits they and the school district would gain by so doing.

Be specific in every case possible to illustrate your abstract or generalized points and your audience will have opportunities for greater appreciation of your message.

## 4 Be as brief as you can be

The greatest fault of most novice speakers is trying to cover too much territory in the time allotted. Lacking experience, a novice does not realize that converting 10-12 notations can eat up a lot of time, and it's downright embarrassing to be beyond the allotted time while still in the speech opening.

The only way to be sure that what you've prepared will fill the assigned 20-minute period and not 40 or 50 minutes is to have a rehearsal. Present the speech before a friend or into a tape recorder, and time it. Then, cut back as necessary to keep to the allotted time.

Most people can easily talk for about an hour on subjects they know well. But very few listeners can remain attentive to one speaker for that length of time. Question-and-answer periods after the formal presentation, however, usually allow the speaker to give more details or amplify major points in a setting with high audience attention.

There is no set ideal time or ideal length for any speech. The proper length can depend on the subject, the ability of the speaker, the composition of the audience, the setting, or other conditions, but in most cases, it is the program chairman who sets the length of the talk. It is up to the speaker to keep within that time, regardless of other factors, and keep it interesting along the way. This is why preparing an excellent speech takes more than just a few minutes.

## Handling tough audience questions

In most speaking situations relating to educational issues, a time equal to or longer than the speaker's time is reserved for questions, and sometimes comments from the audience.

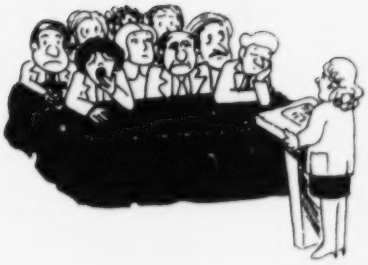
Allowing a question period is usually advisable because (1) it permits the audience to raise matters perhaps not covered by the speaker; (2) the speaker can gain a quick gauge of how well the speech was received; and (3) questions will allow the speaker to amplify or clarify a point not adequately covered in the formal presentation.

The same advice for preparing the main speech applies to handling questions, even the tough ones: **Get right to the point, and be brief.** If you don't know the answer or believe it to be a "hot potato" that you should not or cannot address at that time, say so clearly. The best course is the honest one. People will forgive you for not having all the answers or referring a policy type of question to a higher authority (such as the school board or the superintendent), but they will not accept a speaker who misleads them, regardless of motives.

On occasion, you may face hostile questions from people who disagree with your views and who will use that gathering to throw you a loaded question. Unless you are participating in a formal debate (which can be an otherwise excellent means to air an important issue), resist the urge to argue. You can correct any incorrect facts presented by a person raising a question but restrict your comments to a restatement of your main point or add a few more details in justification.

Even if a questioner is clearly off-base and unfair, the audience makes the final judgement. If you have done your homework and prepared your message according to the needs and interests of the audience, you really don't have to worry about hostile questions and comments.

*Contributed by* ***Albert E. Holliday****, director of the Educational Communication Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations.***



# Writing good speeches and using platform notes

**It's difficult to maintain eye contact with your audience when reading your text word-for-word.**

Prepare for speech writing assignments by developing resources in advance. Keep a file on major educational topics and issues, such as declining enrollment and competency testing by clipping from:

- Educational journals.
- Magazines such as *US. News and World Report, Changing Times, American Demographics,* and local state and regional publications.
- Newspapers.
- Publications of the National School Public Relations Association.

Localize national statistics for comparison.

Develop a topical file of anecdotes, quotes, examples, etc. Clip stories from newspapers and magazines and jot down jokes and anecdotes from other speakers, TV, etc.

Develop a file of colorful phrases and analogies.

**Remember that oral and written language are different in nature.** Written language must be ultimately intelligible to the reader. Spoken language must be instantly intelligible to the listener.

Spoken language is more idiomatic. Otherwise, it sounds somewhat stilted and stuffy. Oral language is more repetitive. It is important to rephrase several times key ideas you want the listeners to take away with them.

Spoken language should be simpler in structure than written language. Oral language is more likely to include questions.

The length of sentences in spoken language is less uniform. Short sentences are shorter. Long sentences are longer. Figurative language adds life and color to spoken words. Imaginative metaphors, similies and alliteration can turn an otherwise pedestrian speech into a memorable one.

There's also a difference in rhythm. Oral language uses more contractions. Read the speech aloud to check on flow of words and phrases and for spots which may be difficult to get your tongue around.

**Be sure to tailor the speech to the talents, traits and thoughts of the speaker.** The language must match the style of the speaker. This means a careful observation of the personality, manner of speech, frequently used words and phrases and overall style of the person you are writing for.

It's also important to get inside your speaker's mind — to know how that person feels and stands on various issues.

A good speech writer who prepares speeches for the same person over a period of time will also develop a "feel" for that person's current priorities which will change from time to time. The latest priority can easily be worked into many speeches — regardless of the topic.

Of course, ideally, the writer will have the opportunity to:

- Make initial notes on the speaker's main thoughts on the speech topic before beginning work on the speech.
- Discuss a rough draft of the main points of the speech with the speaker.
- Go over the finished speech briefly with the speaker.
- Hear the speech and make notes on such things as audience reaction to specific portions.

- Critique the speech with the speaker for mutual improvement.

**Use devices to get and keep the listener's attention.** Start off with an interest-piquer:

- Startling statement.
- Humor that makes a point and sets the stage.
- Children's story.
- Anecdote.
- Analogy that can be woven in and out of the speech and returned to as a clincher at the very end.
- Question that places the listener vicariously in a certain situation.

Mention the names of people present who are well-known to the audience. Use them in hypothetical examples, stories which are obviously untrue, points related to specific needs and interests of individuals.

Make it personal. Speak of a particular person rather than people in general. Localize the impact. Tell how something will help YOU.

Use humor but use it judiciously.

- Creates interest and attention.
- Makes speaker appear more human.
- Should be relevant.
- Should help make a point rather than interrupt train of thought.
- Should be in good taste.
- Should be fresh.
- Use a real-life situation or tell it as a real-life situation.

Lace the speech with case histories, illustrative anecdotes, analogies and comparisons.

Use novel gimmicks, such as making each point start with the same letter — the five x's of motivation.

Appeal to the five senses.

**Help the listener remember the "meat" of the speech.** Develop a purpose statement that tells the listener what will be gained from hearing the speech.

Use three to five main points in the speech. Help the listener

by numbering them — "first of all," "the second point I would like to make," etc.

State in the conclusion what you want the listener to take away with him.

- Rephrase the statement of purpose.
- Summarize briefly the main points of the speech.
- Give the audience a challenge, a plan of action, specific things they can do, when apropos.
- End with a tie-back to the introduction.

Be sure the speech is concise, to the point and not over 20 to 25 minutes for a major address. Remember: the head can comprehend only what the seat can endure.

## How to use notes at the platform

The time needed to prepare a speech — to write the overall main points and supporting factors, a "grabber" opening and an effective conclusion, and to rehearse — may take one hour or 10 hours, depending on what is needed to reach your "comfort zone." This is the stage at which you conclude that you have done about as well as you can to get ready for that group.

The final step must be to prepare the material for use during your speech. there are a number of ways to do this:

• **Some people write an entire text in advance and plan to read the speech.** Its advantage is that nothing is left to chance — every word you plan to say is in print.

The problem here is that giving a speech should be an **oral activity,** not a reading exercise. Far more time and training than the average person is able to devote is required to orally read a speech with effectiveness and without causing resentment of the audience. Maintaining effective eye contact with the audience is difficult when you must follow every line on a typewritten text. Achieving an effect of spontaneity or conversational speech is almost impossible.

• **Some people try to memorize the prepared text, as well as when to gesture, speak slowly or rapidly, etc.** This was the style of

stump speakers many years ago. They went from town to town, giving the exact same fire-and-brimstone speech. They could probably give their speeches in a half-sleep condition, they knew them so well.

If you are called upon to give the same speech more than once, the changing character of different audiences will not permit the same speech again, even if it **could** be memorized. Another danger of the memorized speech is a loss of the train of thought midway through the presentation. Without notes or a text to refer to, the speaker whose mind goes blank is lost.

• **The most effective means is to plan to use note cards,** not the entire text, as you address an audience. Writing an entire text is recommended for first-time speakers. This allows for easy advance critiquing by others (also a recommended practice) and later revi-

Title of speech:

Acknowledge _____

Opening paragraph (type in full)

1st factor:

Example 1
Example 2
Example 3

2nd factor:

Example 1
Example 2
Example 3

3rd factor:

Example 1
Example 2
Example 3

General summary statement and call for action (type in full)

***Use typewritten notes on 5"× 7" cards to outline a speech, giving specific examples.***



187

3. Effective human relations start with me.

- Living in a negative society — story about son starting high school.
- Need: 5 positive comments for every 1 negative to reinforce achievement.
- Most important words —

  5 You did a fine job
  4 What is your opinion
  3 You are important
  2 Thank you
  1 We

- Change organization chart — vertical to horizontal.
- Every person has worth or dignity, regardless of position, title, age, sex, race, education.

***Example note card for the third factor in a speech about improving the working relationship in an organization.***

sion. As a matter of fact, some organizations need a prepared text of a speech to use in a conference report. But in either case, the speaker should use notes when delivering the speech. Convert the text to three or four 5" by 7" typewritten note cards.

**The opening and conclusion should be written in full.** Reading the opening will force you to stick to the script and get to the main point instead of starting with chit-chat, a joke or an apology. Reading the prepared close allows a strong finish. In addition, if you must conclude sooner than you had intended (the program is running long, the body of your speech took too long to cover, etc.), you can jump right to the prepared conclusion without fumbling.

Notes should be as brief as possible. Use key words. "Tell Johnstown incident" should be enough to remind you that at a certain point you'll share information about an incident in which something happened that relates directly to one of your major points.

In no case should you attempt to speak without notes of some kind, even if you think you can do an excellent job without them. You need notes to keep you on target and to avoid rambling. You need notes also to illustrate to the audience **that you have prepared.** A speaker who bounds to the platform and launches into a presentation without any reference materials runs the risk of having listeners think that the entire presentation is off-the-cuff and that the audience is not important enough to have spent time for preparation.

*Contributed by* ***Albert E. Holliday,*** *director of Educational Communication Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations.***

# Self-help suggestions for public speaking

**Speaking in public is the number one fear for human beings. Proper breathing from the diaphragm controls the stress and makes the body more comfortable.**

Of all the potential terrors human beings face, speaking in public is the number one fear. We all need to be trained to use our minds, faces, bodies and voices so the audiences seeing us for the first time will like and believe us. We must train to cope with confrontation.

• **Use your mind to share information, but pause before you speak.** That is the key. To use the tool of your mind to best advantage, remember to remain silent during the pause; maintain eye contact, but don't look frightened or intimidated; don't dignify accusations, rather give them a completely positive answer, something you can say with pride; and give real examples. Don't ever refuse to talk to a reporter; don't give him a chance to say you wouldn't respond.



170

• **A genuine and appropriate smile opens the face and creates warmth and credibility.** A smile can be a put-down with affection.

• **Gestures and body language must always be genuine and appropriate.** When standing, have your hands hanging comfortably at your sides without moving your fingers. Our faces and hands are the "naked" parts of our bodies and we tend to put them away in stressful situations such as interviews with the media. These actions cause self-orientation rather than audience-orientation. You must remember who your audience is when you are being interviewed.

• **The voice is warmest and most believable when the face is open. Concentrate on volume, pitch and rate.** Your volume should be conversational level, not speech level, without preaching, teaching or orating. Talk quietly. Keep the energy in your voice. Nothing is more deadly or destructive to your image than a quiet, closed sound.

• **Proper breathing from the diaphragm is the fifth weapon for good public speaking.** When people fall apart it becomes a stressful situation. The muscles of the neck and head tighten and you show that you're intimidated as your voice rises. Breathing should be healthy, natural, from the diaphragm where it belongs. With controlled breathing, all the other stresses that make public speaking unbearable are diminished. When you breathe properly, your body feels comfortable.

Communication is the transfer of an idea from one mind to another. Instead of concentrating on what you want to say, wondering if your sweaty palms are noticeable or if your audience can see your knees shaking, try to make each person in your audience think you are talking directly to him.

*Excerpted from a presentation by* ***Arch Lustberg,*** *professional communicator, at the 1985 PSBA State Conference. A former university speech and drama professor, he teaches communication workshops for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.*

# Organizing a district speakers' bureau

**Share the school's story on current issues or provide information on vocational topics.**

In just about every average-size community on any weeknight, five to 10 civic and fraternal groups hold meetings, and most of them welcome the opportunity to use an outside speaker — especially if there is no fee — to educate or entertain their members.

Schools can be an excellent source of speakers on two kinds of topics. **One,** educational issues, such as declining enrollment, changing to a middle school structure, starting management-by-objective planning, what SAT scores tell us, or other current matters. **Two,** timeless education-related topics, such as what happened to the new math, benefits of work-study programs, or differences between American and Soviet education (complete with well-chosen slides from a recent trip).

Speeches on current issues are usually given by administrators. They are in the best positions to discuss staff plans or ideas on these topics, which are unusually sensitive or sticky ones. These people also have a great interest in feedback and opinion of lay

citizens. Other topics can be handled well by teachers and other educators who like sharing information on vocational and avocational subjects.

Program chairmen of community organizations will sometimes telephone the superintendent's office to inquire about the availability of a speaker, but this is an infrequent occurrence. For maximum exposure in the community, school officials must take the initiative and solicit speaking assignments via contact with program chairmen.

**Steps to take in organizing and operating a speakers' bureau**

1. Gain approval of the board and superintendent for the initiation of a speakers' bureau.

2. Announce its formation in internal newsletters and at staff meetings. Explain its purpose and that speakers will have opportunities to present materials with interest to audiences in the community. The usual speech will be for 20-30 minutes, with some additional time for questions and answers.

3. Principals can make special contacts with staff members they know who especially enjoy speaking before audiences, to be sure they agree to be part of the speakers' bureau.

4. Put together the list of available speakers and their topics, with provocative titles — "How We Help Them Get There from Here" is better than "My Role as a Counselor."

5. Make a list of current issues of possible interest to parents and citizens. These might relate to why an elementary school may have to be closed, ways the board is trying to cut costs but maintain quality, the impact of the energy crisis on the local budget, the start of a major new citizens' advisory committee, etc. The topics can be listed without an assigned speaker. When requests are received, the principal can check the availability of individual board members or administrators to take each assignment.

6. Publish a flier about the speakers' bureau, topics and speakers, and the procedure one should follow to secure a speaker. (Persons requesting speakers should furnish information regarding the name of the group, how many would be present, date and time of

the meeting, location, whether or not dinner will be served, which speaker or topic is requested, how long they'd like the speaker to talk, and other pertinent information.)

**7.** One person at the office should be assigned the role of operating the bureau — mailing fliers, receiving requests and contacting speakers.

**8.** Names and addresses of presidents and program chairmen of all civic and fraternal groups in the community should be put together in the summer on a master mailing list. (Doing this the first time can be a problem, but other agencies in your community probably already have such lists that they may be willing to share.) Organizations to contact should include PTAs, church groups, fraternal and social associations, business groups, senior citizen associations and others.

**9.** Schedule a brief meeting in early fall for those participants in the speakers' bureau who have had limited experience speaking before large groups. Share with them these tips:

- **Be sure to carefully organize the speech.** Use note cards to avoid wandering from the main subject.
- **Stick to the time allotted.** In fact, be prepared to cut the length of the talk somewhat, as other parts of the meeting may run long.
- **Write out a brief introduction,** including a snappy title, for use by the master of ceremonies.
- **Speakers who plan to use audiovisuals should arrive early** at the meeting site to set up screens and projectors, make sure electrical outlets are handy, and check the location of light switches.
- **Avoid telling jokes.** Instead, allow for natural humor to provide light moments, as appropriate.
- **Plan for a brief question-and-answer period.** If a question is raised that the speaker cannot answer, the speaker should take the name of the person asking that question and provide the answer the next day.

**10.** Mail the flier early in the fall to presidents and program chairmen. Follow up with phone calls to presidents of those groups

whose memberships include the key communicators in your district. You will want to be certain to have at least one speaker before these groups during the year.

*Contributed by* ***Albert E. Holliday,*** *director of the Educational Communication Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the* ***Journal of Educational Public Relations.***

175

# Educational atmosphere-relationship study

**A management-communication inventory to learn employee's perceptions.**

The purpose of this inventory is to learn the perceptions of employees about the nature of management and communication in their school. It also can serve as a springboard for discussion at the office or school level about the need for possible changes in management and communication practices.

Two responses are requested for each item. The **first** is whether or not that activity or process occurs. Answer "yes," or "no" or "unknown." The **second** regards your opinion as to the priority of that item. Answer "highest," "some" or "none."

1. The school has a planned program of community and public relations suitable for its particular needs, problems and resources.
2. One person has the responsibility to supervise the operation of the program.
3. All staff members have specific responsibilities in their school's program.
4. A school newsletter for parents is issued at least four times a year.

5. An orientation handbook is published annually for students and parents.

6. New residents with children are welcomed by a staff representative in person, by mail or phone.

7. Inservice training meetings are held at least annually for all members of the staff.

8. New employees are provided with a program of orientation.

9. Deliberate efforts are made to develop and maintain wholesome and constructive teacher-student relations.

10. Orientation programs are held for students who will advance to different levels the next year.

11. Students are made aware of school rules and regulations.

12. Students have opportunities to learn reasons for their being in school and for their specific learning activities.

13. Students are provided instruction in the history, problems and programs of education, especially at the local level.

14. Student evaluations of school programs are solicited in an organized manner and these evaluations are used as the basis for constructive action.

15. Students are invited to serve as members of advisory and study committees appointed by the school board, superintendent or principals.

16. Morale of students is monitored and reasons for high or low morale identified.

17. Teachers have personal contacts with parents of their students frequently during the school year.

18. Advisory committees of parents, citizens and staff are appointed on occasion to study issues and problems of local concern.

19. The school provides a variety of opportunities for parent involvement, collaboration and interaction.

20. Parent-teacher conferences are carefully planned and scheduled so that student progress and achievement can be reported and discussed.

21. Parents are encouraged to make visits to the school for special events.

22. Citizens (nonparents) are invited to attend special events at the school.

23. The school has an active parent-teacher group which meets frequently.

24. Parents and citizens are invited to serve as aides, assistants, advisers and resource people in schools or at school-sponsored events.

25. Each school unit has at least one open house or school night program so parents and citizens may become acquainted with school personnel, programs and facilities.

26. Administrators and teachers plan and implement informal activities and meetings with parents.

27. The communication program is evaluated every year.

**Climate inventory assessment factors**

These 10 assessment factors can be used by a cross section of board members, staff, parents and others to stimulate discussion and develop a profile of the school system's overall climate of communication and collaboration.

Some of the factors may prove to be argumentative. This is fine as long as the group is able to reach a consensus as to the district's strengths, challenges, and what can and should be done according to your resources and goals.

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The school system and individual schools have planned programs (written) of internal and external communication, and one person has the responsibility to coordinate each program. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. All staff members have specific responsibilities in their school's program. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Goal setting and evaluation are shared processes in the school community. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. The system makes full use of commercial media and its own channels of communication to orient the citizenry about achievements of the schools and the challenges facing schools. | ☐ | ☐ |

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Each school has a variety of opportunities for parent involvement and parent-student-teacher interaction (including the high school level). | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. The system and schools recognize the achievements of students, staff and citizens in a variety of ways. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. Nonparents have opportunities to learn about schools, participate in activities and receive services. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. Major employers of the school's graduates in the area have opportunities for feedback, suggestions and comments. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. Staff members participate in a cross section of community organizations and activities. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. The school-community communication program is evaluated annually. | ☐ | ☐ |

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